

# Taboo in Advertising

Elsa Simões Lucas Freitas



John Benjamins Publishing Company

## Taboo in Advertising

## *Pragmatics & Beyond New Series (P&BNS)*

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### **Volume 179**

Taboo in Advertising

by Elsa Simões Lucas Freitas

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Elsa Simões Lucas Freitas

Fernando Pessoa University

John Benjamins Publishing Company

Amsterdam / Philadelphia



<sup>TM</sup> The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences – Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Taboo in advertising / by Elsa Simões Lucas Freitas.

p. cm. (Pragmatics & Beyond New Series, ISSN 0922-842X ; v. 179)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Advertising--Social aspects. 2. Advertising--Moral and ethical aspects. 3. Taboo, Linguistic.

HF5831 .F74 2008

659.1/042--dc22

2008018018

ISBN 978 90 272 5423 8 (Hb; alk. paper)

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John Benjamins Publishing Co. · P.O. Box 36224 · 1020 ME Amsterdam · The Netherlands  
John Benjamins North America · P.O. Box 27519 · Philadelphia PA 19118-0519 · USA

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## Foreword

Much of the popular attention to advertising is focused on a few ads that challenge taboos, for instance on the treatment of sex, bodily functions, or death. If one turns to the monthly reports of complaints about advertising in Britain, whether in the press or in broadcasting, a number of them deal with images, words, or suggestions that someone considers indecent or transgressive. In 2005, the most complained about ads in Britain included one for KFC showing call centre workers talking with their mouths full, and one for Pot Noodle that 'featured a man with a brass horn down his trousers' ([www.asa.org.uk](http://www.asa.org.uk)). More people complained about these ads than about ads that seemed deceptive, unfair, or even dangerous. Press reports on ads focus a disproportionate amount of attention on a few taboo-breaking ads, such as those for Benetton, Diesel, or FCUK, and in reproducing the posters and repeating the offending scenes, they contribute to public awareness of those ads, those brands, and the cultural boundaries that are being maintained.

Newspaper reports, talk at parties, and denunciations from campaigning groups refer to shock, decency, community standards, and advertising traditions as if the boundaries of what is acceptable and what is effective for the advertiser were obvious and well-known. But are they? The public discussion tends to circle around the same phrases, without much detailed attention to ads and the ways they are interpreted. There have been some more analytical treatments of specific ads in some of the academic studies of advertising language: for instance, Torben Vestergaard and Kim Schrøder in *The Language of Advertising* have a chapter on the gender ideology of ads for sanitary protection; Guy Cook writes about the uses of sexuality in ads for perfume and cars in *The Discourse of Advertising* (2nd ed, 2001); and I have written about AIDS/HIV campaigns in *Words in Ads* (1984). Academics in linguistics, sociology, media and cultural studies, and marketing keep coming back to the ads that explore the uses of words that are supposed to remain unsaid and images that are supposed to remain unseen, because they are the kinds of texts that show how societies are organised and how they are changing.

Despite these studies, there has been surprisingly little serious and extensive analysis of these taboos as they shape the texts of ads, both those ads that avoid causing offence and those that court it. What makes a specific topic or reference taboo (as opposed to just being unpleasant, controversial, or unpopular with some people)? Are the various topics of taboos, from toilet paper to funeral directors,

related to each other, or are they just a jumbled list of social discomforts? How do advertisers who have to deal with these topics if they are to market their brands at all, for instance sellers of condoms or sanitary protection, get their messages across without causing unnecessary offence? And why would any ad for a product that doesn't have any taboos attached (a car, a coffee, an ice cream, a gas utility) deliberately invoke a topic that is supposedly unmentionable? How do visual and aural modes work with verbal modes when taboo is avoided or invoked? And if the invocation of taboo is indirect, how are the texts interpreted?

Elsa Simões Lucas Freitas provides the first systematic monograph devoted to these questions. There are several reasons why this book makes a useful addition to the many books that take up one or another taboo ad in the course of talking about other issues. First, she goes beyond the few well-known controversial cases and has a wide range of examples, for all sorts of products, using all sorts of textual strategies, reminding us just how many ads and product categories have some taboo at issue. She deals with print, outdoor and television ads. The best of her ads in print show us how much an advertiser can do with just a few words and a picture, for instance in the ad for the dog obedience school. The television ads, on the other hand, show how taboo can be expressed or suppressed by the simultaneous use of a variety of modes – written and spoken language, sound effects and music, actions, gestures, and expressions, camera angles, movements, and editing – in texts that are almost too complex to be described in print. As with all the best writing on advertising, a reader comes away with both a new respect for the skills and ingenuity of advertisers, and new anxieties about the potential effects of ads in society.

The book is also notable in using both Portuguese and British examples. There have been book-length studies comparing ads from different countries. But this book is not, for the most part, a study in cultural contrasts; the differences are there, but are too complex and subtle to allow for easy generalizations. Since many of the agencies involved are parts of international networks, and the clients are often multinational brands, it is perhaps not surprising that the two bodies of ads are often similar, and that they include some campaigns that were run in both countries. But there are also differences in the treatment of taboo that emerge when a reader familiar with one set of ads comes across striking examples from the other. The indirectness and wit of the best British ads is well-known, but I was surprised to find the Portuguese more relaxed about some sexual issues, and also less likely to indulge in rudeness as humorous in itself. Similar issues would presumably arise with other bodies of ads – French, Portuguese, Singaporean, or Indian – wherever the advertising industry has to deal with competition for attention by sophisticated use of media. There is room for more work on how the taboo ads reflect and reproduce cultural differences, in these and other cultures, and how they follow and perhaps effect cultural changes by embodying cultural tensions.

This systematic overview and detailed analysis of ads in two cultures provides a useful basis for further studies. The particular ads she discusses may quickly pass out of circulation, but the issues she discusses will remain relevant to each new ad campaign that tests the boundaries of what is considered decent and acceptable.

Greg Myers  
Lancaster University





## Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to a number of people who have contributed, in different ways, to the existence of this book. Greg Myers supervised the PhD thesis on which it is based, and gave me, during the process of writing, invaluable advice and the benefit of his expert knowledge. He was always stimulating, encouraging and supportive throughout the whole process and his constant help made the writing and re-writing of this work even more enjoyable. Guy Cook and Elena Semino very insightfully suggested ways of developing and reshaping the present work, namely with the inclusion of a separate chapter on humour. Thanks especially to Guy for taking the time to send me some of his own contacts of advertisers and organisations, when it became necessary to expand the corpus of ads analysed. I have also benefited from Jonathan Culpeper's very helpful advice and perceptive suggestions during the earlier stages of writing.

Sandra Tuna and Alexandra Guedes Pinto were constructive readers of parts of this work and I would like to thank them for their constant support and for our pleasurable and useful conversations on advertising and linguistics. I would also like to thank my sister, Dora Simões, for using some of her own professional contacts to speed up the clearance process for the ads featured in Chapter Four. My heartfelt thanks also to Allison Byrne, for her careful proofreading and language check of the book's final version.

My special thanks to Professor Salvato Trigo, the Rector of Fernando Pessoa University and to Dr. Manuela Trigo, for allowing me to be on sabbatical leave for two terms and for financially supporting this project.

I also owe deep thanks to my family for their help, kindness and patience. This book is dedicated to my husband and my two daughters, Sofia and Mariana, without whose devotion and support this book would not have been written.

An earlier version of Chapter 6, 'Summarizing: Sanpro Ads' was published previously in *The Language of Advertising*, (2007, London: Routledge), edited by Guy Cook.

An earlier draft of parts of Chapter 4, 'Images, Words & Humour' was presented at the 6th AELFE (Asociación Europea de Lenguas para Fines Específicos) Conference which took place at ISCAL, Lisbon, Portugal, in September 2007. The material presented at the Conference was entirely re-written for this book.

My thanks to Hodder and Stoughton (London) for permission to quote from Dorothy L. Sayers' *Murder Must Advertise*.

Numerous advertising contacts and organisations have kindly allowed me to reproduce their ads, thus contributing to the final form of this book. I would like to acknowledge gratefully the permission to reproduce ad texts and images to the following organisations. The names of the contact people are given in brackets. To all of them, many thanks for their help and for taking time from their busy professional lives to answer my requests:

**Canesten Oasis:** Bayer plc [Betty McDonald], BBDO [Kim Lansdown; Andrew Knell]; **Lactacyd:** GlaxoSmithKline Consumer Healthcare [Vanda Ferraz, Rui Sousa], GreyHome [Marta F. Vital], Slides & Bites; **Sloggi:** Triunfo Internacional [Ina Rellas], Lowe & Partners Portugal [João França Martins, Paulo Gonçalves, Graciosa Machado]; **SOS Sexual Dysfunctions:** Sociedade Portuguesa de Andrologia [Nuno Monteiro Pereira], ESDA [Milly Lemos]; **Anti-smoking ad:** Health Education Authority, Click-Use Licence [Julie Carter]; **Clinique:** Socosmet [Maria João Nogueira]; **Renova Toilet Paper** and **Renova First:** Well-Being World [Nuno Matos]; **Total Recall Travel Agency:** (now GEOTUR at [www.geotur.com](http://www.geotur.com)) [Bruno Simões], Publicis [Heloise Azevedo]; **Benetton:** Benetton Group spa [Bernardo Lecci]; **CECE:** Centro de Educação Canina do Estoril [José Gonçalves], Lowe & Partners Portugal [João França Martins]; **Rover 75:** MG Rover [Jorge Aguiar], Bates Red Cell [Judite Mota]; **FCUK:** French Connection UK [Kirsten Kilby], TBWA [Vicky Allard]; **Zero Films:** Zero Filmes [Neco Schertel]; **Super Bock:** Unicer [António Jorge, João Sampaio, Miguel Araújo]; **Skip Stains and Skip Aloe Vera:** LeverElida Lda. [Erina Neno, Miguel Miranda], Lowe & Partners Portugal [Susana Coerver, Patrícia Pedro, Graciosa Machado]; **Colhogar:** Georgia Pacific Europe [Mark Robson], Bates France [Frederic Arnaud]; **Scottex:** Kimberly-Clark [Rute Meda]; J. Walter Thompson [Tamara Holland-Martin]; **Harpic:** Reckitt Benckiser [Rui Estrela], McCann Erickson [Margarida Ribeiro, Tiago Lucena, Catarina Noronha]; **Fibre 1:** Nestlé Portugal, S. A. [Graça Baptista, Enrique Mestre]; McCann Erickson [Margarida Ribeiro, Tiago Lucena, Catarina Noronha]; **AIDS campaign:** Abraço [Maria José Campos], TBWA/EPG [Cláudia Domingues]; **Impulse:** LeverFaberger [Hannah Collyer], LeverElida [Daniela S. Silva], Ogilvy [Ana Carmo]; **Sanex:** Sara Lee HBC Portugal [Maria José Domingos], Publicis Casadeval Pedreño & PRG [Montse Navarro]; **TMN:** TMN [Duarte Durão], Euro RSCG [Miguel Ralha]; **Combi Danone:** Danone [Natália Janela]; **Martini:** Martini Bacardi [Fernando Ribeiro], McCann Erikson [Margarida Ribeiro, Tiago Lucena, Catarina Noronha]; **o.b. Comfort magazine ad., Carefree Black, Carefree Respirare (hothouse), Carefree Respirare (cheeks), o.b. Comfort television ad:** Johnson & Johnson [Vanda Bernardino], Lowe & Partners Portugal [Heloísa Serra].

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# Introduction

## Taboo and advertising

In its primary form, the concept of taboo, as described by the European explorers of the South Seas, corresponded to a somewhat nebulous notion of “something that should not be touched” – whether because of disgust or awe. In spite of the more or less exotic origin of the word, the semantic area it covers corresponds to realities and social concerns of communities present and past and, in fact, it has become rather comprehensive in its scope, in that it has stood for a large number of avoidance behaviours.

As a sort of preliminary and very simplified delimitation of the concept, taboo can be defined as “a set of attitudes towards dangerous situations” (Steiner [1956] 1999: 107–108; Douglas 1966: 3). A non-specialised dictionary definition of the word provides a few more clues as to its meaning and origins – a definition that will be further developed in Chapter One:

TABOO also spelled TABU, Tongan Tabu, Maori Tapu, the prohibition of an action or the use of an object based on ritualistic distinctions of them either as being sacred and consecrated or as being dangerous, unclean, and accursed. The term **taboo** is of Polynesian origin and was first noted by Captain James Cook during his visit to Tonga in 1771; he introduced the term into the English language, from which it achieved widespread currency. Taboos were most highly developed in the Polynesian societies of the South Pacific, but they have been present in virtually all cultures. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 2000)

These danger-avoiding behaviours can be found in virtually every area of social activity. This book studies the occurrences of taboo in an area of high visibility in contemporary western society: advertising.

Ads can provide valuable and updated information about the way society thinks and acts. If ads try to disguise the taboo charge of their products or if, for some reason, they evoke taboos when presenting them, it is because those taboos exist more or less consciously in the minds of readers and viewers and, therefore, can be successfully played upon. Advertising is always a handy and useful mirror

if we want to reflect on the way we behave socially (Cook 1992: 5). The description of its most general characteristics can be found in the general definition below:

The techniques and practices used to bring products, services, opinions, or causes to public notice for the purpose of persuading the public to respond in a certain way toward what is advertised. Most advertising involves promoting a good that is for sale, but similar methods are used to encourage people to drive safely, to support various charities, or to vote for political candidates, among many other examples. In many countries advertising is the most important source of income for the media (e.g., newspapers, magazines, or television stations) through which it is conducted. In the noncommunist world advertising has become a large and important service industry. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 2000)

This book is centred on print, outdoor and television ads, which constitute the texts to be analysed. They include ads that try to persuade people to buy goods or services, but also ads that try to influence people's behaviour for more altruistic reasons.

Due to the special characteristics of the media that convey them (television, hoardings and pages of magazines), these texts transmit their message by means of more than one code: linguistic forms, but also pictures, sounds and music. This analysis aims to consider all these components, since each of them contributes to the overall meaning of the text. In spite of the difficulties of dealing with such different codes simultaneously, and even, as in the case of music, with the unavoidable high degree of subjectivity if translated to words, none of them can be neglected, as a mere linguistic analysis would leave much unsaid. In fact, as we will later see, when the issue is taboo, much of the message is often conveyed by means other than words.

The analysis of taboo in these ads implies the recourse to theories and concepts that belong to different areas. Among others, concepts from sociology and anthropology are necessary to narrow the definition of taboo. Some insights from the discipline of social and media studies are fundamental to the understanding of such a broad and pervasive subject as advertising. Finally, linguistics provides the tools for analysis of the strategies that make taboo available for interpretation.

This book analyses the ways taboo is made visible or, alternatively, dissimulated in terms of verbal, visual and aural strategies that can be found in ads. In fact, due to their nature, some products such as sanitary pads imply negative connotations and cause embarrassment especially when mentioned in public, a situation which advertising – television advertising, mostly – very often implies. In these cases, ads try to avoid the inherent taboo charge of their products by using a number of taboo-avoiding tactics. Taboo is something that must be hidden by means of different advertising strategies. On the other hand, there are ads such as those for cars, alcoholic drinks or perfumes that use intentional reference to a

taboo of some kind to advertise a product that does not present any taboo connotation. Taboo becomes, in this case, an advertising strategy in itself.

The objective of this book is to contribute to the further understanding of one among the many strategies used by advertising. Judging from the large number of ads where it can be found, it is a very commonly used one – sometimes in a sophisticated manner, in other ads very clumsily – and its use by advertising certainly deserves more detailed academic analysis. If so many ads resort to taboo as a strategy, it is because it is effective for their purposes. It is worth trying to find out why and how taboo can contribute to this.

What makes this particular area so appealing as a subject for study is that it demonstrates beyond any doubt that taboo is not such a quaint, old-fashioned concept as might be expected from the more or less exotic and anthropological connotations of the word. Rather, it is something that is still very much present in contemporary society. Reflection on its occurrences – namely in advertising – can yield important clues as to the way society sees itself and is structured around divisions, classifications, restrictions and separations (Douglas 1966). Issues such as dirtiness, sex, and some bodily functions, to name but a few, are still commonly referred to by euphemism and indirectness, which indicates the existence of a taboo subject. What we have in this book is the analysis of some evidence that proves the ‘survival’ of taboos in an age where reason and rationality would seem to be paramount, that is, more of a practical and pragmatic approach to the subject than the anthropological perspective the title might lead the reader to expect. The detailed study of that evidence, i.e. linguistic, visual and aural (music and speech) information present in the ad is also a fascinating ground of research when dealing with this subject, calling for analysis of the means by which we convey a message and avoid conveying it at the same time – by no means an uncommon situation in daily social exchanges, but still one that requires considerable tact and advanced social skills.

### Data selection

This book analyses a total of thirty-four ads from a time span of nine years (1997–2006). This selection includes both commercial ads (thirty), non-commercial ads (three) and one business-to-business ad. Both commercial and non-commercial ads are included, in order to broaden the range of ads presented. Another reason for including them is that non-commercial ads often resort to shock approaches in order to attract the viewers’ attention to subjects that are often taboo. Thus, they present a special case in the use of taboo.



The criteria underlying their selection had to do with the language used. This corpus is constituted by ads that use the Portuguese or English languages, to ensure some diversity of target audiences.

Secondly, these criteria were connected with the content and form of the ad itself. In all the ads chosen for analysis, (a) there is a connection with taboo, whether in the product advertised or in the approach used to advertise a given product; (b) there are linguistic and non-linguistic features; and (c) in the case of commercial ads, the product advertised is shown in the ad. This eliminated some possible candidates, which were excluded when no discernible relation between the product and the ad could be detected. Some print ads that looked promising in taboo content – such as Benetton's catastrophe ads, among others – were excluded, as the only linguistic element they presented was the brand name. These requirements exclude from this discussion some of the most famous and studied ads with taboo approaches, which have already become classics in the history of advertising. They have already been the subjects of extensive academic criticism (among others Sischy 1992; Brierley 1995: 205, 206, 235; Toscani 1995; Cádima 1997: 87–89, 92; Falk 1997; Hoechsmann 1997; Calazans 1998; Boucherie Mendes 1999: 84; Brochand et al [1993] 1999: 115, 422; Dooley 2000; Ivinski 2000; Lourenço 2001: 30–31). However, the present work is concerned with less obvious aspects of taboo and the way they are interconnected with a visually present product or service.

This book is focussed on ads that combine both linguistic and visual elements, since they have the possibility of doubling the inferential demands on the viewer and/or reader. Also, an apparently innocuous linguistic message can be twisted or contradicted by the non-linguistic elements presented – or vice-versa, since we are using two different means of expression (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 2). This intertwining of layers of meaning contributes to an ambiguous reading of the ad, where so many possibilities of taboo interpretations can be inscribed.

This work is based on the analysis of television, outdoor and print ads. The print ads analysed were gathered in Portugal, England, and Brazil, although some of them were part of international campaigns in Europe and America. They have been chosen from the range of magazines published in these two countries over the time span of nine years.

As to the outdoor ads analysed in this book, they are part of a single Portuguese advertising campaign for a brand of beer.

The television ads analysed were videotaped in Portugal, although the majority of them was also broadcast at the same time in other European countries. The inclusion of ads in two languages will hopefully make this work more appealing to a wider number of readers and it will also allow the establishment of some hypotheses about the use of taboo in advertising in more than one culture, incomplete and empirical as they may be due to the lack of a comparative approach. The choice of

ads from these three different media widens the focus of analysis, since all of them present specific technical possibilities that are taken advantage of by advertisers.

This study does not feature ads that appear in important media such as radio, cinema, and the Internet for methodological reasons and lack of space. It is very likely that, in these media, taboo readings are also used as strategy, and it is certain that they also have ads for taboo products or services, which have to be disguised somehow.

Readings of the presence of taboo are dependent on the analysis of textual and visual codes. Therefore, the media from which the ads were to be chosen had to present the technical possibilities that would enable the foregrounding of these two codes. What follows is a brief presentation of the type of ads included, the media chosen and a preliminary reflection on the special use of some of their characteristics that taboo ads might give to them.

### **Commercial, non-commercial, and business-to-business ads**

For this book, I selected commercial and non-commercial television advertisements, and one business-to-business ad. Nevertheless, in this selection, as in the average television break or magazine advertising pages, the vast majority of ads broadcast and printed are of the commercial kind.

The purpose of commercial ads is that of increasing awareness and generating positive feelings and connotations about a product or service in the mind of prospective buyers in such a way that these feelings will persuade them into a purchasing decision (Nilsen 1979: 137; Smith 1982: 190; Charaudeau 1983: 122; Ogilvy [1983] 1995: 5, Dahlet 1985: 343; Casanova 1990: 137; Ortega Martínez 1991: 14–16; Brierley 1995: 1; Wells et al 1998: xvii–xviii, 12–13, Yeshin 2006: 1, 8–11). This implies that, taken in conjunction with other elements of the marketing-mix, selling is the overall objective of a commercial ad, and its intent is that of making a profit (Hafer and White 1989: 2; Ortega Martínez 1991: 37–38; Wells et al 1998: 16). From all the possible strategies ads can follow, the ones that will have more relevance for this study are those that play with the viewers' anxieties, namely losing face or lowering of self-esteem (Brierley 1995: 166–167) – very commonly used in ads with taboo products – and those which resort to escapism and fantasy (Brierley 1995: 167–168), a strategy that is very often obtained through deliberate use of taboo.

The aim of non-commercial advertising is primarily that of changing attitudes. Very commonly, ads encourage viewers not to engage in risky behaviour and adopt safer practices. The intention behind this kind of advertising is not that of obtaining a profit, even if donation of money or time to a socially worthy cause is involved

(Ortega Martínez 1991: 50; Wells et al 1998: 16). The reason examples of non-commercial advertising were included in this selection was that they often resort to the depiction of taboo matters or even decide to take a taboo approach to an anodyne subject in order to shock the audience and thus draw further attention to their cause, a strategy that can be described in the following manner:

Adverts may sometimes want to shock the reader for very good reasons (...) charities and other fund-raising groups have used some of the traditional methods of commercial product advertising to get their campaign noticed, and one of these methods has been the disturbing image, as a way of presenting the case for the need of support.' (Goddard 1998: 12)

Unlike what usually happens with commercial advertising, audiences allow and accept this taboo of transgressing the boundaries of what normally belongs in their private sphere. This happens because the public recognises in this kind of advertising a better and nobler motive than the one that motivates commercial ads: in this case, strategies of taboo transgression and shocking approaches are effected in the name of the community's best interests, which justifies and legitimises them.

Non-commercial ads are usually extremely ingenious, as the copywriters and art directors are not impaired by the demands of clients, unlike what usually happens with commercial ads, where they have to take into consideration constraints such as agency fees or price of media time (Wells et al 1998: 14).

Business-to-business ads are meant to be viewed by professionals who need the products or services advertised as supplies for their own businesses (Hafer and White 1989: 202–203; Ortega Martínez 1991: 86). Because buying decisions in these cases can be crucial for the development of the enterprise, rationality and information are usually valued in these ads (Wells et al 1998: 649–650), unlike what often happens in commercial advertising, where the promises made are often left to the subjectivity and fantasy of the viewer. However, as the analysis of a business-to-business ad selected will demonstrate, even in an area where cold business decisions are taken, taboo approaches can be used to make an ad work.

### **Print ads and transcription methods**

All the print ads selected for study in the following chapters come from non-specialised magazines. These are a privileged medium for the use of visual codes, since they have the possibility of presenting high quality colour reproductions in the ads they show (Wells et al 1998: 323). Text and play with textual codes can also be rather complex and sophisticated (Cook 1992: 60–90), and long copy can be

used (Wells et al 1998: 323). This is, by definition, a medium absorbed at leisure by the reader (Leiss et al 1990: 2). Information – and ads – are stored and can be retrieved at will, when the reader is in the proper state of mind to pay attention to what is inside the magazine (Book and Schick 1997: 136; Wells et al 1998: 301).

Reading is an individual activity, and the act of reading a magazine can be considered a rather private one. This is an important factor for the establishment of a feeling of intimacy between the voice in the ad and the mind of the viewer, which allows relative freedom as to which taboo strategy to use. When the taboo is hidden, the subterfuges, euphemisms and enlarged metaphors are sure to be shared references between friends. When the taboo is foregrounded, the intimate atmosphere established allows some liberties that would be more difficult to tolerate if the ad was being watched in company.

This combined notion of privacy, free time and willingness to read in detail can be important for the conveyance of some taboo meanings that rely on indirectness or creation of moods by means of textual devices. Ads placed in magazines also have the possibility of zeroing in on their intended target group with a high degree of accuracy (Book and Schick 1997: 136–137; Wells et al 1998: 322). This is an added advantage both for ads that are forced to deal with taboo – readers will understand what they are talking about and why reticence is necessary – and for ads that want to have taboo present, since readers are more likely to appreciate that taboo intrusion as a compliment to their specific preferences. To achieve this goal, and because of their format, magazines have at their disposal creative possibilities such as gadgets, scratch-and-smell devices and other attention calling features (Wells et al 1998: 323). This strategy is put to good use in one of the ads in Chapter Three that presents a suggestive pop-up visual to reinforce the taboo motif of its product.

The magazines used for selecting material are Portuguese and British ones. The Portuguese magazines are *O Independente* (magazine-like newspaper supplement), *Volta ao Mundo*, *Caras* and *Elle* (Portuguese edition). The British magazines are *Cosmopolitan*, *Vogue* (British Edition), *Harper's Bazaar* and *Loaded*. They have been chosen from the range of magazines published in these two countries over a time span of nine years.

Since most ads in this selection appeared unchanged in many other magazines apart from the ones they were taken from, there does not seem to be much interest in trying to study these particular taboo ads based on the profile of the audiences or measurements of magazine readership. Exceptions to this would be the ads that appeared in *Volta ao Mundo* (Fig. 7, an ad for a travel agency) – and, as far as could be ascertained, nowhere else – a Portuguese magazine about tourism and exotic destinations, which is aimed at people in their late twenties/early thirties. The specificity of its subject theme, the glossy aspect and high price make clear that it is

directed at an upmarket segment. Also, a more attentive look at the destinations mentioned and the hotels and resorts discussed makes it evident that the magazine is meant for people who are willing to spend a reasonably high amount of money on holiday packages. These features possibly indicate a medium-high cultural level and an interest in the kind of ad that uses taboo as a sort of well-bred and culture-specific code with a connection to exotic travelling.

The only example of business-to-business advertising in this selection was taken from a specialist Brazilian magazine, *Propaganda & Marketing*, which is aimed at people working in the area of advertising and marketing. An ad of this type was included because it presents a rarely found use of a taboo approach – extremely rude language shown in an explicit manner – that can be partially explained because of the high specificity and the characteristics of the audience it is aimed at.

The data presented for analysis has been transcribed in order to provide the easiest possible access to it as the reading proceeds. The magazine ads selected are presented by means of a copy alongside their analysis. Their respective written texts were transcribed in order to facilitate reading, as the lettering becomes almost illegible in most cases due to copy reduction. Alongside the pictures of the ads and respective transcriptions, there is also a short description of the image itself, in order to draw the attention to some details that might go unnoticed in the reduced copy, which might prove relevant for the subsequent analysis.

### **Outdoor ads and transcription methods**

Outdoor ads are one of the several forms of out-of-home advertising, which also includes transit ads, skywriting, inflatable devices, in-store displays and ads in shopping trolleys, among other possibilities. All of these are widely used, with hoarding and street furniture appearing as the most popular categories (Belch and Belch 2004: 432–433).

Although all these categories of out-of-home advertising represent flexible and versatile forms of reaching people on the move (Wells et al 1998: 506), their characteristics of size and placement would seem to effect a natural restriction to the kind of product or service being advertised there, making them a more natural choice, for example, for local services, telecommunication and car ads, food retail and seasonal offers (Belch and Belch 2004: 433), than for most taboo products, which normally would demand some degree of privacy on the part of the viewer. In this case, people who come across these ads are, by definition, out-of-home, i.e. in a public space, where these ads which are there for everyone to see can be even more shocking than on the pages of a magazine or on the television screen. However, the fact

that this medium is, in fact, used for some products of this kind confirms the immense possibilities in indirection strategies at the disposal of advertisers, which are put to a good use in order to avoid excessively outrageous approaches.

In most outdoor publicity, in order to create immediate impact, the visual part of the ad will be paramount, paired with short but very effective copy (Wells et al 1998: 508), so that the message can be immediately absorbed by the viewers, during the few seconds they will be exposed to it.

A possible exception to this rule would be the case of posters placed in bus shelters, where people are placed in an in-between situation, i.e. out of the house, but not on the move, with time to spare until the next bus comes and, therefore, mentally predisposed to welcome something to do, namely, reading a text with some complexity in an poster placed before their eyes. This specific situation presents some similarities to the mental attitude normally observed in magazine reading, except possibly for the facts that an in-house situation is normally more comfortable – which could be a factor in the absorption of the message –, and that in a bus shelter we can come across any kind of ad, whereas in a specific magazine, some targeting of its readers by the media planners has already taken place – albeit with a variable degree of accuracy.

The outdoor advertising analysed in this book was part of a campaign by a Portuguese sales-leader brand of beer, Super Bock. It was launched in Portugal during the summer of 2006 and could be seen in outdoors and bus shelters all over the country, with a high degree of repetition, as befits a product whose seasonal characteristics are exploited to the maximum during the Portuguese warm months.

As in the case of magazine ads, the Super Bock out-of-home ads are reproduced alongside their respective analysis, together with a short description of the image. In all the cases, the copy of the ad is reduced to a single word in large lettering, which requires no translation to be fully understood, when paired with the respective image.

This campaign was chosen for analysis to illustrate the use of humour in a campaign that deliberately chose to present a taboo approach to a product that, intrinsically, has no taboo connotations. In this case, humour worked as the factor that allowed the use of this device and, at the same time, helped create an endearing relationship with the whole campaign and increase the reputation of this brand as a producer of good advertising.

## Television commercials and transcription methods

Television presents some advantages for advertisers, especially because of the high impact it has due to the combination of sound and image (Wells et al 1998: 343).

This factor can account for a closer relationship between the viewer and what is being shown, since more sensory levels are involved. This is a possible strong point for taboo ads, where familiarity with the product and intimacy with the viewer are part of some indirection strategies. The high concentration of information in television ads also contributes to draw the viewer in, since a lot depends on the viewer's inferencing capacity (Kan 1992: 12).

Another form of making the ad look more life-like is by exploiting the narrative and drama possibilities allowed by the medium. This strategy is often found in the ads that will be analysed in the following chapters. Some of them explore soap-like formats, which present predictable schemata for interpretation, reinforce the sense of familiarity on the part of the viewer and allow for the creation of human-interest points (Glaessner 1990: 119; O'Shaughnessy 1990: 97). Others resort to the use of humorous narratives, which the technical possibilities of television can greatly enhance:

Verbal humour, being based around the use of language to create jokes or comic situations, allows writers to construct interesting dialogue between characters. Visual humour is particularly appropriate to television because it can select certain images and draw the viewer's attention to them (they include events going on in the scene which the main characters do not see, *or going in for a close up of a particular reaction to a joke or event*). (Bowes 1990: 137, *my italics*)

This is what happens in one of the television ads selected (Fig 16), where interpretation is anchored in the succession of close-ups of two women's faces at the crucial moments. This ad clearly illustrates the medium's capacity to reproduce life-like inferential processes and indirection techniques people use on a daily basis when they need to avoid taboo subjects. This is a situation the viewer can easily identify with, since the dialogue, reactions, hesitations and silences happen at a very natural pace.

As we have already seen in outdoor ads in the previous section, humour as a strategy in taboo ads is an effective way of diverting the viewers' attention from what is unpleasant and making them a part of the group that understands the joke (Bowes 1990: 137). When the ad is for something that is taboo in itself, it is a safe form of referring to irritating products without the irritation factor. The reaction of viewers to the ads about these products can be described in the following manner:

Research into irritating product advertising has found that a major source of irritation is the product itself; for example, feminine-hygiene products, underwear, laxatives, and haemorrhoid treatments.... *In the case of a sensitive product, the ads are more irritating when the product and its use are emphasized: indirect approaches seem to work better.* Viewers also don't like to see people 'put down' or forced into stereotypical roles. Neither do they like to see important relationships



threatened, such as mother-daughter or husband-wife. (Aaker and Bruzzone 1985: 249, *my italics*)

Advertising of these products can be especially annoying and intrusive when the medium used is television, since the mentioning of such issues can be particularly embarrassing when the viewer is not alone, unlike what happens with magazines. After all, something that belongs in the private sphere is being discussed publicly. Advertising on television is intrusive by nature, since it interrupts what people are interested in watching. Hence the need to make ads that are interesting, creative, close to the viewer, and non-irritating. All of these are heavy demands, especially in the case of ads for products which are irritating by nature.

The television commercials used in this analysis were videotaped from three Portuguese TV channels: RTP1 (Radiotevisão Portuguesa 1), SIC (Sociedade Independente de Comunicação), and TVI (Televisão Independente). Since only Portuguese television ads will be analysed and no comparison is intended with television channels from other countries, the characterisation of the channels where the selected ads came from will be very concise. RTP1 is a public service television channel (even if it also broadcasts commercial ads), and it has been broadcasting since 1937. According to 1997 data, it came second in the national audience ranking in terms of advertising revenue. SIC was the first private channel and its broadcasts began in 1992. It is a mass-oriented channel and occupies an undisputable pole position both in audience rankings and advertising revenue. TVI, the other private channel, appeared in 1993, and has maintained a steady third place in audiences in the above categories (Cádima 1997: 53–69; Brochand et al [1993] 1999: 334–335). In terms of the kind of advertising they accept, it is nowadays almost impossible to detect any difference between them. However, at the beginning of its broadcasts, TVI (which was then owned by the Catholic Church) was extremely reluctant to accept ads for taboo products or ads with taboo approaches. In the meantime, another company acquired TVI and it is now being managed like any other private and profit-minded channel. It has since lost its religious connotations and its high sensitivity to taboo, both in programmes broadcast and in ads shown during commercial breaks.

Like what happens with the majority of the ads from magazines chosen, the television data is composed of ads that were broadcast very often and on all of the above three channels. After all, television is a non-selective medium – which can be seen as one of its drawbacks (Wells et al 1998: 344) – and it is not the fact of ascribing them to a certain channel that defines the targeted consumer profile but rather their content, strategies used and modes of address, all of which constitute the primary object of study in this book.



The transcription of television ads poses some special difficulties, and everyone who writes about television commercials faces the same insoluble problem: it is impossible to show them on the pages of a book. The following comment by David Ogilvy clearly expresses the difficulties one faces when it comes to the transcription of television commercials: "All I can do is reproduce some storyboards which illustrate my points, and pray that you can decipher them." ([1983] 1995).

The fact that television ads contain so many audio and visual elements working together at the same time makes it difficult to transcribe them all while maintaining that simultaneity. Therefore, in order to allow readers to have an approximate view of the television ads chosen a description of its elements is indexed (following the structure of a television script), with photographs of each key frame<sup>1</sup>. For this purpose, there are three columns for the transcription of each television ad. One of them presents the audio elements (occasionally divided into "music" and "voice", depending on the type of ad). The other shows the video elements and a third one contains the photos of the key frames.

In the "video" column, camera terms are used to explain what is happening in the scene. For specialised terminology and respective definitions that describe the various video directions, information was adapted from Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 130), Book and Schick (1997: 221–224), Wells et al (1998: 459), and Rose (2001: 48–52). This list of terms is by no means exhaustive, since there are many other possibilities of camera movement, shot distances or connections between scenes. Those defined below are the ones that will be used in the transcripts (some of them by means of the initials in brackets).

A close-up [CS] is a camera shot that shows the actors' faces. When used to describe the camera and a person, it is possible to see the head and shoulders. For an object, we would be able to see it in full with a small blank area around it. The medium close shot [MCS] cuts off the subject approximately at the waist. When filming an object, it would be entirely visible, as well as the foreground, background and other props on the side. In a medium shot [MS] the subject is cut off approximately at the knees. When used for filming objects, a person usually stands next to the product. A long shot [LS] shows the human figure from head to toes. As with MS, it is not used to frame the product alone. The extreme long shot [ELS] is wider than the previous. The person is framed from head to toes, and background and foreground are visible. It is only used for objects to achieve a dramatic effect or the product is a part of a larger unit (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 130).

Cameras can zoom in and zoom out. This means that the lenses manipulate the distance: in the zoom in the image seems to come closer and get larger; in the

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1. The "key frames" column was omitted in the cases where it was not possible to obtain permission to reproduce images from the ad.

zoom out, it seems to move farther away and get smaller. In the pan right or pan left, the camera is stationary but swings to follow the action. In the truck right or truck left, it is the camera itself that moves right or left with the action.

Transitions in scenes can be achieved by means of a cut, an abrupt, instantaneous change from one shot to another. In a lap dissolve, a new scene fades in while the previous one fades out.

Another device that is often used is the voice over [VO], which means that someone invisible is speaking. In several of the television ads from this selection, it clearly corresponds to the voice of the narrator.

### Translation of material in television, outdoor and print ads

In the case of the Portuguese magazine ads quoted in this book, an English translation is provided. In all cases, the translation of the copy is my own, even when there is an English-speaking version of the same ad. All the commercials here analysed were videotaped from Portuguese television. Therefore, an English translation of every written and spoken element in each of them is also presented in the “transcription” column.

This translation tries to reproduce as much as possible the meaning and effects of the original texts. While they are not professional advertising translations – which are, very often, undertaken by in-house translation services at the multinational responsible for broadcasting the ads – they do try to retain the effect of equivalence of the formal elements that allow the public to identify them as belonging to the advertising *genre*. This attempt often poses problems in languages so structurally different as Portuguese and English:

Portuguese adverts are unlikely to display the prodigality of compounds used in pre-modification structures of English adverts, since the Portuguese language does not allow such versatility. In addition, post-modification is more common in Portuguese. Nevertheless, many (...) linguistic devices (...) are also present in Portuguese advertisements, namely the preference for direct address forms, such as imperatives and interrogatives, which constitute the reader as the addressee, and formal schemes (parallelism), including anaphoric structures, which influence the way adverts are perceived and memorised (...), and which are often combined with other devices. (Tuna 2004: 32–33)

Alterations such as these had to be undertaken in the translations of some of the ads, in order to make them sound natural. In some specific cases, other characteristics of Portuguese language that have influenced some translation decisions are explained in more detail in the analysis of the adverts at stake.

Comparing the three media

As we can see in the following table, the three media where the ads analysed in this book come from present both advantages and disadvantages when it comes to dealing with taboo, mainly due to the specific technical characteristics of each of them. These specificities are always taken advantage of, which makes it possible to say there is no one medium that is the best for taboo products and services or for deliberate taboo approaches. In fact, all of them can be used for that purpose, by highlighting one of its aspects and downplaying others in accordance to the specific needs of each ad (or taboo) at stake.

Table 1. Advantages and disadvantages of the different media

MEDIA	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Magazine advertising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Offers to the advertisers the possibility of segmentation;</li><li>– It implies willingness and mental predisposition on the part of the reader to spend some time in that activity;</li><li>– Provides privacy in the perusal of ads;</li><li>– Offers possibility of longer text and high-quality image in ads;</li><li>– Articles and adjoining ads can be re-read and later retrieved at leisure by the reader.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– It is a static medium: only visuals are possible.</li></ul>
Out-of-home advertising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Offers instant impact;</li><li>– Can catch the viewer unaware, so the surprise effect can be maximal;</li><li>– Offers high repetition and frequency;</li><li>– Almost impossible to miss</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Elaborateness must be replaced by extreme simplicity, both verbally and visually, due to the shortness of exposure;</li><li>– Ads are usually short-lived;</li><li>– It is a static medium: only visuals are possible.</li></ul>
Television advertising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– High impact due to the combination of movement and sound;</li><li>– Offers high repetition and frequency;</li><li>– It is a highly appealing medium for the masses.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Restricted segmentation potential;</li><li>– Ads and the messages they convey are often short-lived;</li><li>– Ads have to compete with many others during commercial breaks, the only space and time where they can be broadcast.</li><li>– For the viewer, ads often function as unwelcome interruptions of what they are really watching.</li></ul>

The table above recapitulates and contrasts the diverse aspects of the different media.

It is important to note that all the disadvantages mentioned above for each medium can be – and often are – transformed into advantages by clever advertisers. Just to mention one example, the fact that a magazine is a static medium did not hamper the advertisers for Sloggi Underwear (Fig 3) from representing the movement intended for their product. In fact, as we will see in Chapter Three, they even managed to depict it in a more interactive way than they would be able to in a television ad.

## Structure of the book

The book is structured in the following manner.

Chapter One is dedicated to a more detailed delimitation of the concept of taboo, with an overview of the major works on the subject and the working definition that will be used in this study. The form *taboo*, as defined for this purpose, stresses the need for the maintenance of clear demarcations and categories in social life. This need brings important consequences for those ads that deal with taboo, since they must always try to achieve a balance between how much of the taboo it is possible to hide and, conversely, how much of it can be mentioned.

Chapter Two discusses some previous works on advertising, selected from among the huge amount of literature on the subject in existence. I chose them because of: (a) the useful and updated insights they bring to the understanding of advertising and (b) the basis they provide for a study such as this one, which involves the analysis of visual and textual inferences present in ads. Even if none of them deals directly with taboo-related inferences, their reading is similar to the one in use here and, therefore, they provide useful methodological models for this study. The linguistic approaches to advertising presented by authors such as Cook (1992) and Forceville (1995) are the ones that present more similarities with the approach of this book.

Chapter Three (Words & Images) is focused on taboo disguising or enhancing devices that are highlighted by the higher quality reproduction allowed by pictures in magazines – pictorial metaphors and juxtaposition of word and image. It also focuses on textual cues – indirectness (that can hide or suggest taboo) in the copy of the ad and inferences obtained from slogan and headline, which can suggest a taboo meaning that is not explicitly referred to or, conversely, hide it if it is already present. In fact, as we will see, the same device can be used for hiding and for suggesting the taboo. These devices are then related to some of the taboos found in this category, namely evocation of eroticism, reference to bodily functions, reference to disease, and use of bad language.

Chapter Four (Images, Words & Humour) focuses on one of the most prominent strategies in disguising or enhancing taboo, i.e. humour, demonstrated with ads from an out-of-home advertising campaign. This chapter is especially concerned with the close interaction between an impacting image and short but powerful text for maximum effect during a very limited exposure time. This restriction imposed by the medium requires, as we will see, extreme condensation of the strategies used. After being detected by the viewer, these can then be reactivated and remembered every time the same ad is seen again – one of the advantages of the medium that can counterbalance the necessary simplification of the material.

Chapter Five (Words, Images, Sound & Narrative) deals with taboo-disguising or taboo-enhancing strategies that require some development in space and time, as allowed by the medium: developing pictorial metaphor, narrative, allusion, intertextuality, reticence and hesitation in dialogue. Then, a correspondence is established between these devices and taboo categories such as dirtiness, other bodily functions and evocation of eroticism.

Even though the devices mentioned above are obviously not exclusive to any of these media, they are thus separated for methodological reasons, in order to avoid burdensome repetition of devices and types of taboo found.

Chapter Six functions as a summing-up of the taboo subjects and strategies studied in the previous chapters. It is dedicated to ads about sanitary protection (pads and tampons), on television and magazines. These products, connected as they are with menstruation, the classic example of taboo (Steiner [1965] 1999: 207; Douglas 1966: 135–140), evoke a number of strong taboo issues – bodily functions, sex, disease, dirtiness – and ads for them use a combination of strategies that alleviate the product's excessive taboo charge and allow the public mention of menstruation without embarrassment.

The concluding chapter also puts forward some hints as to the way these devices might appear in other ads and even in texts belonging to other genres, to allow further research in this area.

### **Chart of print, outdoor and television ads**

As a transition to the chapters dedicated to the analysis of the print, outdoor and television ads selected, this chapter ends with a chart that contains the main information about them. The categories included in the chart are the following: name of the product or service; the type of product or service (taboo-related or non taboo-related); the approach adopted (disguising or foregrounding taboo); the form in which taboo is suggested and / or avoided (by use of textual, visual and audiovisual devices) and, finally, the relationship between the addresser and the

addressee (demonstrating which previous knowledge it is necessary to activate so that the disguising and / or evoking of taboo can be fully understood).

The information contained in this chart is necessarily simplified. However, as it refers to the vital points on which the analyses are based, it functions as an introduction to the next chapters, where the points systematised here will be developed at length.

Table 2. Chart of ads in Chapter Three

Product or service	Type of product or service	Kind of taboo involved	Approach adopted	How taboo is avoided	How taboo is evoked / suggested	Relationship addresser / addressee
Fig. 1. Canesten (cystitis treatment)	Taboo-related	Sex-related disease, body functions	Disguising taboo	Pictorial metaphor	Textual elements	Assumption of shared knowledge with viewer
Fig.2. Lactacyd (intimate cleanser)	Taboo-related	Exposing privacy	Disguising taboo	Pictorial metaphor	Textual elements	Assumption of shared knowledge with viewer
Fig.3. Sloggi (men's shorts)	Taboo-related	Display of sexual organs, body functions	Disguising and foregrounding taboo	Pictorial metaphor; verbal indirectness	Pop-up visual	Assumption of shared knowledge with viewer
Fig. 4. SPA (Male dysfunctions)	Taboo-related	Sex-related problem, exposing privacy	Disguising taboo	Pictorial metaphor	Textual elements	Assumption of shared knowledge with viewer
Fig. 5. HEA (Anti-smoking)	Not related to taboo	Dirtiness, pollution	Foregrounding taboo	_____	Pictorial metaphor; parody of other ads	Appeal to viewer's previous schemata
Fig. 6. Renova (toilet paper)	Taboo-related	Body functions, sexual activity	Disguising and foregrounding taboo	Replacing one taboo by another	Images of 'clean' sex, nakedness	Assumption of shared knowledge with viewer
Fig. 7. Total Recall (travel agency)	Not related to taboo	Reference to sexual organs	Foregrounding taboo	_____	Pictorial metaphor; visual 'poetry'	Appeal to culture-specific knowledge
Fig. 8. CECE (dog school)	Not related to taboo	Sexual intercourse	Foregrounding taboo	_____	Parody of famous ad	Assumption of shared knowledge with viewer
Fig. 9. Rover 75 (car)	Not related to taboo	Reference to sexual organs	Foregrounding taboo	_____	Pictorial metaphor	Assumption of shared knowledge with viewer
Fig. 10. FCUK (clothes)	Not related to taboo	Bad language	Foregrounding taboo	_____	Use of language	Assumption of shared knowledge with viewer
Fig. 11. Zero Filmes (film producer)	Not related to taboo	Bad language	Foregrounding taboo	_____	Parody of traditional 'thank you' speeches	Assumption of shared knowledge with viewer

Table 3. Chart of ads in Chapter Four

Product or service	Type of product or service	Kind of taboo involved	Approach adopted	How taboo is avoided	How taboo is evoked / suggested	Relationship addresser / addressee
Fig 12. Super Bock Miss Playbock 1 (beer)	- Not related to taboo	Reference to body parts	Foregrounding taboo	Humour in pictorial metaphors	Textual and visual elements	Assumption of shared knowledge with viewer
Fig.13. Super Bock Miss Playbock 2 (beer)	- Not related to taboo	Reference to body parts	Foregrounding taboo	Humour in pictorial metaphors	Textual and visual elements	Assumption of shared knowledge with viewer
Fig.14. Super Bock Wonderbeer (beer)	- Not related to taboo	Reference to body parts	Foregrounding taboo	Humour in pictorial metaphors	Textual and visual elements	Assumption of shared knowledge with viewer
Fig. 15. Super Bock Topless (beer)	- Not related to taboo	Exposure of privacy	Foregrounding taboo	Humour in pictorial metaphors	Textual and visual elements	Assumption of shared knowledge with viewer
Fig. 16. Super Bock Latin lover (beer)	- Not related to taboo	Reference to sexual habits	Foregrounding taboo	Humour in pictorial metaphors	Textual and visual elements	Assumption of shared knowledge with viewer



Table 4. Chart of commercials in Chapter Five

Product or service	Type of product or service	Kind of taboo involved	Approach adopted	Cues in avoiding taboo	Cues for evoking taboo	Relationship addresser / addressee
Fig. 17. Skip (clothes detergent)	Taboo-related	Dirtiness	Disguising taboo	Pictorial metaphor	Textual elements	Assumption of shared knowledge with viewer
Fig. 18. Scottex (toilet paper)	Taboo-related	Body functions, excretion	Disguising taboo	Use of animals	Textual elements	Assumption of shared knowledge with viewer
Fig. 19. Colhogar (toilet paper)	Taboo-related	Body functions, excretion	Disguising taboo	Use of children	Textual elements	Assumption of shared knowledge with viewer
Fig. 20. Harpic (toilet disinfectant)	Taboo-related	Excretion, dirtiness	Disguising taboo	Extended pictorial metaphor	Textual and visual elements	Assumption of shared knowledge with viewer
Fig. 21. Fibre 1 (cereal)	Taboo-related	Reference to body function, excretion	Disguising taboo	Verbal reticence / euphemism	Meaningful eye contact	Assumption of shared knowledge with viewer
Fig. 22. Abraco (AIDS prevention)	Taboo-related	STD	Disguising taboo	Pictorial metaphor	Text / image of condoms	Assumption of shared knowledge with viewer
Fig. 23. Impulse (deodorant)	Taboo-related	Body smells	Disguising and foregrounding taboo	Replacing one taboo by another	Pictorial metaphors	Assumption of shared knowledge with viewer
Fig. 24. Sanex (deodorant)	Taboo-related	Body smells	Disguising taboo	Stylized approach	Kissing naked armpits	Assumption of shared knowledge with viewer
Fig. 25. Skip A.Vera (clothes detergent)	Not related to taboo	Nakedness / Original Sin	Foregrounding taboo	_____	Pictorial metaphor	Assumption of shared knowledge with viewer
Fig. 26. TMN (mobile phones)	Not related to taboo	Reference to sexual activities	Foregrounding taboo	_____	Suggestive language	Assumption of shared knowledge with viewer
Fig. 27. Combi (yoghurt)	Not related to taboo	Reference to body function	Foregrounding taboo	_____	Suggestive noises	Assumption of shared knowledge with viewer
Fig. 28. Martini (alcoholic drink)	Not related to taboo	Reference to sexual activities	Foregrounding taboo	_____	Pictorial metaphor	Assumption of shared knowledge with viewer

Table 5. Chart of ads in Chapter Six

Product or service	Type of product or service	Kind of taboo involved	Approach adopted	Cues in avoiding taboo	Cues for evoking taboo	Relationship addresser / addressee
Fig 29: o.b. Comfort (tampons)	Taboo-related	Menstruation	Disguising taboo	Dialogue format and visuals	Textual elements / photo of product	Assumption of shared knowledge with viewer
Fig 30: Renova First (pads)	Taboo-related	Menstruation	Disguising taboo	Intertextuality	Visuals of pads	Assumption of shared knowledge with viewer
Fig 31: Carefree (pads)	Taboo-related	Menstruation	Disguising taboo	Visuals / music	Textual elements	Assumption of shared knowledge with viewer
Fig 32 Carefree (pads)	Taboo-related	Menstruation	Disguising taboo	Pictorial metaphor	Textual and visual elements	Assumption of shared knowledge with viewer
Fig 33: Carefree (pads)	Taboo-related	Menstruation	Disguising taboo	Pictorial metaphor	Textual and visual elements	Assumption of shared knowledge with viewer
Fig 34: o.b. Comfort (pads)	Taboo-related	Menstruation	Disguising taboo	Pictorial metaphors, narrative format	Textual and visual elements	Assumption of shared knowledge with viewer



## CHAPTER 1

# Taboo

The ideal order of society is guarded by dangers which threaten transgressors...  
The whole universe is harnessed to man's attempts to force one another into  
good citizenship.

Mary Douglas

### Introduction

Ads represent a concrete proof of the presence of a number of taboo issues that can be found everyday in contemporary Western society. Issues such as eroticism and sex, dirtiness, bodily functions, disease and bad language are dealt with on a daily basis, and ads are trustworthy witnesses to the way people feel about them. That is the reason why ads need to hide some issues in careful and ingenious manners, which can be foregrounded by a detailed study of their verbal, visual and audio elements.

This chapter refers to and comments on the main theories that try to analyse these and other taboos, their origin and ways of functioning, in order to bring further insights to the understanding of the taboo issues above. Although it is not the aim of this book to enter deeply into purely anthropological or religious matters, it is nevertheless important to present some brief reference to the origin of the concept of taboo and to the different theories that have reflected upon its social import throughout the times. This outline establishes the main points connected with this subject and prepares the delimitation of the working definition of taboo that is used here.

The structure of this chapter is centred on a few of these theories, those that bring important insights for the area covered in this work. Each one of them considers one of the taboo areas studied: (1) obstacles to the clear categorisation of the individual in given situations (symbolised by certain bodily functions and disease); (2) defilement and pollution (visible in dirtiness and in bad language); and (3) threats to traditional social institutions (embodied in eroticism and sex). It is a fact that all these categories are related. It is also a fact that taboos for the individual are reflected in social life and individual transgressions affect the social tissue as well. The purpose in grouping taboos according to these broad categories was purely methodological.

The working definition of taboo used in this book is based on the above theories (among others, Robertson Smith's ([1869] 1912), Frazer's (1875; 1911), Van Gennep's (1908), Marett's (1921; [1921] 1929), Wundt's (1916), Radcliffe-Brown's (1964), Lévy-Bruhl's ([1931] 1936), Mead's (1934), Freud's (1938), and Snaith's (1944)), as well as on Steiner's ([1956] 1999) rethinking of and conclusions on this subject. As to the practical application of the concept of taboo to the ads analysed, I have drawn heavily on Douglas's (1966) approach to the presence of taboo in so many areas of everyday life. For the specific taboo related to the use of bad language, reference is made to linguistic studies that explore the ways language can invoke taboo and can even constitute a taboo in itself (Andersson and Trudgill [1990] (1992); Hughes [1991] 1998). For the treatment of the taboo that constitutes the theme of Chapter Six – menstruation – insights from some of Claude Lévi-Strauss's works (1964, 1967, 1968, 1971) are also used.

The aim in reviewing all these theories is to offer important contributions for the delimitation of the concept, i.e. what it is, what areas it covers and with what areas of social life it is connected. The final purpose of this chapter is to achieve a properly grounded and satisfactory definition of taboo that covers the data selected for analysis.

### **The origins of the word**

When the first navigators that reached Polynesia came across the word *taboo* (with slight variations in pronunciation in the different islands) its precise meaning eluded them. It is described by Captain Cook as “something mysterious”, or, not much more explicitly, as “a sort of religious interdiction” (Steiner [1956] 1999: 111). This incapacity to attribute an exact signification to the word was translated by a general feeling of mystification, amusement, and indulgence on the part of navigators for such primitive and exotic habits. These, for instance, allowed native women to wander around almost naked but strictly forbade them from sharing a meal with visiting strangers (Steiner [1956] 1999: 111–112).

These impressions were discernible in most accounts of early visitors to set foot in the Polynesian Islands. The attempts to explain the boundaries of the concept usually stressed the word's religious and secular connotations. Even during these first contacts, the importance of taboo in establishing social hierarchies was immediately noticed. Some of the early visitors went as far as elaborating long lists of taboo items they came across. This demonstrates both the strangeness felt towards such exotic customs and the omnipresence and importance accorded by natives to taboos in their social and religious lives.

In Polynesia, taboo presents a very close relationship with power. The power that a chief accumulated over the years was easily measured by the number of taboos he could decree, thus functioning also as a clear indicator of the standing of a given individual in the social hierarchy. Those placed higher up would have the right to impose taboos, whereas those at the bottom of the scale should respect that imposition. In a taboo-society like that of Polynesia, these impositions and prohibitions were a useful means of regulating matters of rank, personal property and ownership. It was thus a way of reinforcing the existing social structure. In this type of culture, taboos are, in themselves, important regulatory powers that affect different areas of life, which, in other societies, would be managed and sanctioned by other institutions.

It was through these accounts that the word was introduced into Europe in the 18th and 19th century, where it rapidly lost its exotic edge and became a part of everyday language, as a synonym of “forbidden”. However, in its Polynesian origins, the word had a wider range of meaning, as it combined *holy* and *forbidden*, a concept that the Europeans cannot express in one single word. The understanding of this dual meaning is very often lacking in the theories that study taboo (Steiner [1956] 1999: 118–119). The concept of *taboo* in Polynesia does not correspond alternatively to *prohibited*, *sacred* or *defiled*, as some dictionary definitions might tell us. Rather, it combines all of them, establishing a relationship between prohibition and sacredness, and making some kinds of impurity or defilement derive from that connection.

In fact, not all types of impurity constituted taboo, which makes this a very singular concept as to the specific significations it encompasses:

(...) I prefer to stress the uniqueness of this semantic configuration, in which that which causes ritual impurity goes under the same name as all the contexts implying awe, obedience, abstention, or keeping of distance (...). The Polynesian concept is so surprising because it seems to lack the polarity which we associate not only with sacredness but with *every* highly charged notion. (Steiner [1956] 1999: 119–120).

The fact that this word originally comprehends so much – itself and its opposite, as it were – makes it possible to support the thesis that there is much more to taboo than we normally think. Our dirt avoidances (a very common issue in ads that are so frequently repeated on television) involve other aspects than hygienic concerns (Douglas 1966: 6). They certainly have a lot to do, as well, with a transcendent ideal of perfection that is inspired in the divine. Apparently daily and ordinary taboo matters such as the ones analysed here may in fact be revealing as to the connectedness of what is viewed as merely material and what is considered only spiritual. It is very likely they are different approaches to the same reality – a

proximity the primitives fully understood, and one that the civilised are seldom aware of in everyday life.

### **Taboos about the categorisation of the individuals in given situations**

Several great thinkers of the Victorian period (or its equivalent throughout Europe) developed theories concerning the problems raised by taboo and avoidance strategies. It is possible that this interest was due to some characteristics of the Victorian age itself, namely to the fact that this was also an intensely taboo-prone society, where a number of avoidance behaviours were positively valued and were also strictly related to well-compartmentalised social classes (Steiner [1956] 1999: 133). The observance of these avoidances was thus a means of showing inclusion in a given social stratum, which was also marked by the usage of a restricted range of vocabulary. Some words and expressions would become taboo for some people, while they were employed by people from different social classes.

Two Victorian thinkers, W. Robertson Smith and Sir James Frazer made important contributions for the further understanding of taboo and its functioning. They were also responsible for the consecration of a biased perspective in anthropological and religious studies, which prevailed for a considerable number of years, i.e. a rigid division between “the primitives” and “the civilised” in terms of conceptualising ability and type of spirituality. This view had some followers and traces of it can still be found in Lévy-Bruhl’s writings on primitive thought a number of years later.

Robertson Smith’s theory of taboo is, above all, a theory of the holy. Therefore, he establishes a distinction between what is spiritual and what is mere superstition. In his studies of the Semitic religion, he detected the coexistence of a highly spiritual (and highly valued) spiritual system with more lowly forms of fear of the supernatural, a situation he explains by means of the theory of “survivals” (previously developed by Tylor ([1873] 1913). These survivals would be leftovers from primitive times, i.e. taboos.

Taboo appears as a useful category for Robertson Smith, in that it allows the differentiation of what is high and worthy of study from what is superstition. There is a coexistence of (1) taboos “that exactly correspond to the rules of holiness” – located in the domain of the religion proper – and (2) taboos that have to do with fear of contagion by uncleanness. These would have to do, for instance, with isolating women during menstruation or after childbirth, or fearing contact with someone who touched an ill person or a dead body. Robertson Smith points out that, in savage societies, the distinction between taboos of holiness and taboos of uncleanness is often blurred and vague. On the other hand, a society where a differentiation

is established between the two types possesses a higher degree of moral awareness and sophistication. They have learned to distinguish between the holy and the unclean and to value the former more. Douglas summarises this dichotomy in the following manner:

In this way a criterion was produced for classing religions as advanced or as primitive. If primitive, then rules of holiness and rules of uncleanness were undistinguishable; if advanced then rules of uncleanness disappeared from religion. They were relegated to the kitchen and bathroom and to municipal sanitation, nothing to do with religion. *The less uncleanness was concerned with physical conditions and the more it signified a spiritual state of unworthiness, so much more decisively could the religion in question be recognised as advanced.* (Douglas 1966: 11, my italics)

Robertson Smith's theories correspond to a feeling of superiority towards the more primitive cultures. They are called so because Western culture considers them several steps behind in terms of evolution. This attitude appears, very often, disguised as a benevolence that verges on the patronising. Frazer would be an example of such short sightedness, which prevents him and his followers from perceiving that many "primitive" ways of reasoning and behaviours are rather close to ours (Magli 2001: 117).

Robertson Smith's theory of the holy was a decisive influence to the theological and sociological reflections that followed. However, his theory of taboo presents some weak points. Mainly, these have to do with the moral valuation of the attitudes that underlie the "more primitive" taboos that, according to Robertson Smith, persist alongside the strictly religious ones. This approach – and taking into consideration the state of anthropological research at the time Robertson Smith was writing (Douglas 1966: 11–12) – leads him to postulate the existence of these two different types of taboo. One of them belongs to the area of the *correct* spirituality. The other consists of elements of a "less pure" spirituality. This theory can easily be questioned, seeing that "just as the refined and advanced harbour the primitive in their midst, so primitive systems may not be without some supposedly refined and advanced values." (Steiner [1956] 1999: 138). We could say that, in this work, a two-way system is postulated, where inputs from what is *primitive* are essential to what is more sophisticated – or rather, that distinction is blurred. These are, in fact, two different but complementary ways of viewing reality (Steiner [1956] 1999: 155).

Robertson Smith's theories present some useful insights into the working definition of taboo used in this book, especially in his characterisation of "advanced" religions, a definition that applies to our own society. In spite of the fact that Robertson Smith was writing over a hundred years ago, many of his ideas still play an important part in our way of thinking today. The tendency to explain away primitive concerns and taboos in terms of metaphysical queries of the individual or the community itself seems to be a general bias. This is easily explained, in fact, if we



take into consideration the kind of society they were living in and the ideas prevalent at the time. However, as Douglas objects, metaphysical interpretations were not the primitives' primary concerns. It was their own social structure they were trying to order and re-order according to the higher rules of the cosmos. This passage by Douglas, despite its length, is worth quoting in full, since it effectively summarizes the need for the existence of taboo as means of social organisation:

Why me? Why today? What can be done about it? These insistent demands for explanation are focussed on an individual's concern for himself and his community. We know now what Durkheim knew, and what Frazer, Tylor and Marett did not. These questions are not phrased primarily to satisfy man's curiosity about the seasons and the rest of the natural environment. *They are phrased to satisfy a dominant social concern, the problem of how to organise together in society.* They can only be answered, it is true, in terms of man's place in nature. But the metaphysic is a by-product, as it were, of the urgent practical concern. The anthropologist who draws out the whole scheme of the cosmos which is implied in these practices does the primitive culture great violence if he seems to present the cosmology as a systematic philosophy subscribed to consciously by individuals. We can study our own cosmology – in a specialised department of astronomy. *But primitive cosmologies cannot rightly be pinned out for display like exotic lepidoptera, without distortion to the nature of a primitive culture. In a primitive culture the technical problems have been more or less settled for generations past. The live issue is how to organise other people and oneself in relation to them; how to control turbulent youth, how to soothe disgruntled neighbours, how to gain one's rights, how to prevent usurpation of authority, or how to justify it.* (Douglas 1966: 92, my italics)

Our common sense tells us that “we”, the civilised ones, are very distant from primitive fears and superstitions. Spirituality and morality are institutionalised by religion, and uncleanness, pollution and fears of contagion are effectively taken care of with a wide number of cleansing, hygienic and medical products. Therefore, for us, as for Robertson Smith, spirituality and moral values are totally apart from “lowly” matters. According to him, this is as it should be, for in this separation lies the mark of an advanced society.

Robertson Smith's ideas were a source of reflection, inspiration and criticism for several other thinkers. One of these scholars was Sir James Frazer, who concentrated his own research on some of the points previously discussed by Robertson Smith. He reinforced and developed some of the notions that were already implicit in Robertson Smith's work, namely the evolutionary concept that make the primitives seem so distant in every aspect of thinking from ourselves. Although he had some followers at the time, Frazer's approach raised a number of objections from several other thinkers (Douglas 1966: 25, 28). In fact, there are many aspects in his theory that invite immediate criticism, and which derive from what has been

called “the intellectualist approach”, a school of thought that evaluates and criticises the adequacy of the means of action of the individuals in a society according to its own set of convictions. They were thus overlooking the fact that social contexts and the purposes of individuals differ and that the difference should be taken into account, properly studied and not just taken for granted. Frazer’s writings do not contribute much to the enlightenment of central questions regarding taboo such as attempting to make a comprehensive study of taboo as it appears in a given society, or what characteristics of a society make taboo an important part of it. It does not consider which sanctions correspond to each breach of taboo, nor the way different aspects of taboo are connected with many other aspects of social life. These are all sociological issues, and they are the ones whose analysis is most relevant for this analysis.

When moral valuation is detached from polluting issues, these issues would seem to lose their taboo charge, and become simple, everyday matters that can be easily dealt with – and no feelings involved. However, as this analysis will demonstrate, this is not exactly how it works. In many ads from this selection, it is possible to detect a more or less explicit (moral) evaluation of the type of pollution and impurity involved. This accounts, on the one hand, for the need for subterfuge and diverting strategies when discussing it. On the other hand, it explains the moral objections that can (and frequently are) raised when ads deliberately resort to special types of taboo in order to attain their purposes.

Lévy-Bruhl ([1931] 1936) approaches the matter of primitive mentality primarily in terms of collective thinking, an angle that effectively contributes to the better understanding of taboo issues (Steiner [1965] 1999: 185–186) and also one that can help clarify the central sociological issues about taboo mentioned above. Lévy-Bruhl’s main interest was the study of the social contexts where taboos appear, which he divides into two major groups. There are those that have to do with transgression of taboos and those that are related to defilement and purity issues (Lévy-Bruhl [1931] (1936). When analysing the transgression group, Lévy-Bruhl establishes taboo as the means to reintroduce normality after the breach has occurred ([1931] 1936: 220). Taboo has thus an important social role, that of establishing limits to certain behaviours but also providing the mental apparatus that will allow for the transgression to be punished and things to be put right again. If we compare contexts and civilizations, this is a very different way of punishing transgression from our own (Lévy-Bruhl [1931] 1936: 224) However, Lévy-Bruhl excessively widens the gap between *them* and *us*, and places himself in an easily criticisable position. One such critic was Evans-Pritchard:

What Lévy-Bruhl should have done, Evans-Pritchard has said, was to examine the variations in social structure and relate them to concomitant variations in the

patterns of thought. Instead he contented himself with saying that all primitive people present uniform patterns of thought when contrasted with ourselves, and laid himself open to further criticism by *seeming to make primitive cultures more mystical than they are and making civilised thought more rational than it is (...)*. (Douglas 1966: 77, my italics).

The reading of taboo in terms of protection from danger in a number of social situations is, as we have seen, especially relevant to this analysis of taboo. Danger and some degree of risk are present in every social exchange (Steiner [1956] 1999: 188; Douglas and Wildavsky 1983: 6), in Polynesia and in contemporary society alike, and individuals must have some sort of insurance against it. Taboo played that role in the past, and still plays it today.

Van Gennep (1908) brings some important psychological insights to this work, namely the idea that indefinite states can be a source of danger to the individual who is undergoing the experience but also to the rest of the community. In fact, many taboos have the function of somehow establishing a boundary where there is none, in order to minimise the risk implied in the crossing of borders. Van Gennep was aware of an aspect of taboo that other academics failed to perceive in clear terms: the margins function as a threat to the organised pattern established in a society, and whatever lies in-between defies categorisation and carries in itself the possibility of disruption. Douglas describes his perspective in a metaphoric way:

He saw society as a house with rooms and corridors in which passage from one to another is dangerous. Danger lies in transitional states, simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable.... The danger is controlled by ritual which precisely separates him from his old status, segregates him for a time and then publicly declares his entry to a new status. (1966: 97)

When dealing with defilement and purity related taboos, Lévy-Bruhl ([1931] 1936) stresses the connection between the individual affected and the rest of the community. It is not only the person defiled that is endangered, but potentially all the others, because danger can be transmitted by means of contagion. This is an important insight into the social aspects of danger and the way it affects the individual and the surrounding community. Taboo, i.e. a number of avoidance behaviours, pervades social relationships and is certainly much more present in everyday life than is normally noticed. This approach brings an important contribution for the present analysis in that it firmly establishes taboo as a *communicating* phenomenon, something that spreads to the rest of the community and thus necessarily elicits reactions.

It is true that Lévy-Bruhl circumscribes its existence to primitive societies characterised by a pre-logical model of thinking – and it is one of the purposes of this study to try to demonstrate that our contemporary logic can coexist perfectly

with taboos of many kinds. However, this questioning of one of Lévy-Bruhl's basic tenets does not destroy the usefulness of its sociological approach. Of all the thinkers discussed so far, he appears to be the first to direct the discussion to the angle most fruitful for this work, which is that of sociology. His contribution is, therefore, important, for a study that aims, among other things, to find proof of the existence of rigid taboos in some light-hearted contemporary ads.

These attempts to impose a given "proper" pattern upon society are still very much present in our post-primitive societies. Situations such as serious illnesses, public display of some bodily functions, or reference to transitory conditions such as menstruation are very often considered taboo, in that they make it more difficult to ascertain the clear position the individual should occupy in the community. Many of the ads selected for analysis in this book depict embarrassing situations whenever there is public confrontation with a taboo of this kind. Menstruation seems to raise the strongest feelings, and could even be considered the most representative example of this type of taboos. Therefore, a more detailed analysis of its functioning will help characterise this whole category.

In his attempt to present a universal and unifying perspective that combines the diverse systems of knowledge into a sort of universal harmony, the French structuralist Claude Lévi-Strauss depicts menstruation (as well as other defiling elements of the bodily waste type) as a highly signifying sign in terms of defilement potential. It is to be found in the basis of many ancient myths recurrent in different tribes studied throughout the American continents. In them, menstrual blood is surrounded by a large number of precautions, lest its toxicity menace the community and endanger social order (1967: 218; 1968: 340; 1971: 119, 122, 169). This blood is usually considered "dirty". However, a strict periodicity in women's menstrual cycle is also something desirable, in that it reproduces cosmological order and guarantees the proper functioning of the community. Its absence would mean social deregulation and, correspondingly, the malfunctioning of the higher spheres of the universe (1968: 182–183; 1971: 188–189). However, this apparently paradoxical attitude corresponds, after all, to the approach of some of the ads present in this selection, which put the emphasis on the wonders of femininity while relegating reference to menstruation to the background.

In this work, Lévi-Strauss equates the monthly *règles* with all the other rules that women should obey and which are imposed on them by men in order to control the intrinsic feminine power of disruption (1968: 182), a concept that was further developed by Kristeva ([1980] 1982). It provides some useful insights as to the restrained and always-in-control attitude of the women in most sanpro ads. This is something demanded of them by the surrounding male community to mimic continuous and uninterrupted harmony.

Apart from this important contribution, the author also puts forward an idea that will be essential for this analysis. Menstruation – just like birth-giving or illness – corresponds to an intense physiological process that must be mediated with the help of tools, i.e. the hands are not allowed to touch the body when it is undergoing these “raw” situations. The process demands the presence of an intermediary that will effect the transition between a *raw*, natural state to a socialised and tamed condition (Lévi-Strauss 1964: 341–342).

Douglas (1966) emphasises the importance given in the tribes studied to transitional states such as menstruation as a source of danger and power. They constitute a menace to the pattern that guarantees the stability of social life, because they are somewhere beyond the margins of that same pattern. Bodily margins are traditionally considered symbols of that combination of power and danger and the natural margins of the body echo the boundaries of the community itself. In an attempt to find the reason for this specific body symbolism, Douglas points out that

... all margins are dangerous. If they are pulled this way or that the shape of fundamental experience is altered. Any structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins. We should expect the orifices of the body to symbolise its specially vulnerable points. Matter issuing from them is marginal stuff of the most obvious kind. Spit, blood, milk, urine, faeces or tears by simply issuing forth have traversed the boundary of the body. So also have bodily parings, skin, nail, hair clippings and sweat. (1966: 122)

Matters that come out of it are in-between, in a sort of no-man’s land, therefore escaping classification. In several of the tribes studied, the impossibility of defining such a condition is seen as a source of danger to the person and to others: “Danger lies in transitional states, simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable.” (Douglas 1966: 97). Therefore, the altered subject is cast aside for a time and then re-integrated in a new situation (1966: 97–98). It is interesting to note that precautions to avoid this danger of defilement must be taken by the surrounding community, because the subject cannot do anything to annul the transitional situation he or she is in (Douglas 1966: 98) – apart from obeying the segregation imposed while the condition lasts.

In the specific case of menstruation, the danger comes from the fear of dissolution of the boundaries that separate both sexes. When menstruating, women can contaminate men with their “feminine” traits. In the tribes analysed, that contamination would correspond in a general way to incapacity of productive action in outdoor activities, i.e. a loss of virility that implies a great risk to the whole community (Douglas 1966: 154–155). During that time of the month, a woman’s feminine essence is no longer safely contained inside the boundaries of her body, and

this leakage means that the wholeness of the being is at risk, and the perfect separation of the sexes is menaced (Douglas 1966: 159).

This notion that, somehow, menstruation causes women to fall temporarily out of the pattern is still very much present today, and is highly visible in the way ads for sanitary products highlight their capacity of making a menstrual day a day like any other. If they insist so much in telling women that they do fit in social life during these days as they would in any other day it is possibly because a psychological resistance of some kind has to be overcome. What the sanitary products ads tell women is that precautions taken by others can be replaced by precautions taken by self, thus rendering the former unnecessary. It can be argued that the underlying concept corresponds to a sort of confidence trick. If the product is used correctly, you might pretend that you are not menstruating (even though you know you are) and make the others believe the same – though they all know that at some time you must be.

Taboos in this category reveal that there is still uneasiness when it is necessary to deal with margins, marginal stuff that issues from the borders or even marginality itself. All these are situations that disrupt existing patterns and that contend with the ideal of wholeness and perfection that underlie social structures.

### **Taboos about dirtiness and bad language**

Dirtiness, as a form of pollution, is something to be avoided. Its functioning is very similar to the previous taboo with regard to the possibilities of defilement involved in issues such as illness and bodily functions. It questions the way things are organised and interferes with our sense of propriety: “Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organise the environment.” (Douglas 1966: 2). Although many ads for household cleaning products (to mention but one example of the most recurrent type of ads on TV) usually stress the item’s increased hygienic power, it is not really the fear of bacteria that is at stake:

In chasing dirt, in papering, decorating, tidying we are not governed by anxiety to escape disease, but are positively re-ordering our environment, making it conform to an idea. There is nothing fearful or unreasoning in our dirt-avoidance: it is a creative movement, an attempt to relate form to function, to make unity of experience. (Douglas 1966: 2)

Dirt appears, then, as a threat to social order. It is as if, when we let our houses accumulate dirt, it will end up by engulfing our very sense of owning a home, that is, of being part of a family and a community. An ad for a household disinfectant that

appeared on Portuguese television a few years ago depicted this idea of intrusion and demarcating lines very clearly. A young mother and her baby are in the kitchen. The mother is cooking and the baby is sitting on the floor. Suddenly, the scene changes and we are looking at the front entrance of the same house. There is a “welcome” mat in front of the closed door, and a cockroach is sneaking in through the slit under the door. When it gets to the kitchen, the mother suddenly sees it, shrieks in horror and picks up the baby in her arms immediately. The rest of the ad shows the disinfectant at work, and the way it can contribute to a cleaner and more hygienic home life. The last image we see is the front door of the house protected by a green fluorescent line that would repel bugs from coming in. The lines that separate *home* from *dirty nature* are very clearly drawn here. They should not be crossed, and to prevent it, there is a closed door. Nevertheless, transgressors and intruders can still find a way in, should they want to do so. Therefore, a product like this disinfectant works to reinforce that dividing line, making that door safer. This apparently negative action (killing / stopping / preventing / avoiding) involves, however, a positive and more creative one: thanks to the action of the product, *home* is more perfect than ever, cleaner, tidier, with a happier family – and not merely a cockroach-free house.

The knowledge structures we use in order to cope with our surrounding environment are felt to be in danger, with the invasion of unclean and disturbing elements (Douglas 1966: 37–38). The social environment is perceived as a web of lines that must not be crossed, on peril of shattering a very delicate balance. These lines are fragile and flimsy, and pollution-related taboos have the role of protecting them. Any transgressor would be blamed for having crossed the line and for endangering others, even though, for us, sanctions for polluting behaviour are mainly social sanctions:

With us pollution is a matter of aesthetics, hygiene or etiquette, which only becomes grave in so far as it may create social embarrassment. The sanctions are social sanctions, contempt, ostracism, gossip, perhaps even police action.’ (Douglas 1966: 74).

Taboos about bad language have an identical protective role. Sanctions for its use are also the same: “A lot of people react in about the same way to dirt, untidiness, immorality and bad language, with the same faces, frowns and wrinkling up of the nose.” (Andersson and Trudgill 1990: 37). Dirty words can evoke dirty subjects, thus making them present and real. They are capable of dirtying sacred subjects and they can be used to insult others (Andersson and Trudgill 1990: 15). Their disruptive possibilities are several, in that they (1) bring to the public sphere matters that should be kept private, namely sexual issues; (2) they mix what should be only spiritual with what, for us, is merely lowly and material, a distinction that is,



as we have already seen, a commonsensical one for contemporary civilisation. Finally, (3) they debase the essential humanity of the individual by the attribution of animal characteristics, as often happens with insults.

In all these situations, bad language constitutes a threat to the proper classification of individuals inside the group or to the functioning of the community itself. As Andersson and Trudgill point out,

Body, soul and language – we want them all to be clean and nice. Our point is that these things go hand in hand. What all this means is that it is hard to know how people have built up their ideas about bad language and that these ideas may be related to very basic ideas in the culture about purity and cleanness in general. (1990: 36)

It is a fact that people still react strongly to some bad language. If religion and sacredness are no longer extremely sensitive areas, dirty words about sexuality are still capable of causing strong offence. The reason for the inclusion of this specific taboo in this book is that advertising is capable of making the most of its shocking potential in order to achieve its aims. This is apparently a paradoxical strategy, that of uttering “that which is unmentionable” (Hughes [1991] 1998: 279). That is the case of some ads in this selection that suggest or explicitly mention extremely rude words as a form of appealing to a carefully targeted audience. On the contrary, other ads go to great lengths to avoid mentioning words that might be felt as rude, connected as they are with taboo. Some flagrant examples of this situation can be found in ads for sanitary products studied in Chapter Six.

### Taboos about threats to traditional social institutions

Freud’s writings on the subject of taboo – most specifically, those reflections that appear in section two from his work *Totem and Taboo* (1938) – present some points of special relevance for this analysis. They explain why taboos that help regulate social life, like the “proper behaviour” ones mentioned immediately above, can be turned upside down and be used as an effective advertising strategy.

In the second essay of *Totem and Taboo* (Freud 1938), “Taboo and the Ambivalence of Emotions”, Freud begins by looking into the origins of the word and tries to find a comprehensive expression that translates the concept in order to make it understandable for contemporary readers. “Holy dread” would sum up both aspects of taboo, that of sacredness and that of uncleanness. These two areas, for Freud, correspond to two entirely separate branches that coexist under the name of *taboo* (Freud 1938: 821). In this assumption, he is following in the footsteps of the other thinkers that preceded him and whose opinions have already



been reviewed in this chapter. However, he does not establish this division into two words solely due to “contamination” from the contemporary linguistic praxis, where there seems to be lacking a concept that encompasses both meanings (sacredness *and* uncleanness) in one word – as in the Polynesian “taboo”. This division would correspond, in Freud as in other thinkers, to two different stages in human societies. In the initial stage, taboo meant *unclean, uncanny, dangerous* and *forbidden*. The later stage identifies taboo with what is *sacred* and *consecrated* (Freud 1938: 821). This passage from “fear of the unknown” to “respect for a divinity” would mean a step further in the evolution of mankind, in that there would be some sort of domestication of instincts and a channelling of all that raw material into the proper grooves. If we postulate that taboo is one thing or the other, but not both at the same time, we are stripping the concept of its complexity and possibilities of meaning. Consequently, we are making it the ideal ground for primitive minds that, from the Victorian point of view, seem to thrive on superstition and inexplicable interdictions that only marginally could have anything to do with civilised religion.

However, this notion that taboo dates from a pre-religious age of man, and is a phenomenon apart from other types of religion proper is one that, in Freud, is directly connected to one of the main tenets of his psychoanalytical theory (Steiner [1956] 1999: 201). This theory is, according to Freudian reasoning, the starting point for the analysis of several psychoanalytical phenomena. It is, thus, logical that it should function as the cornerstone of Freud’s investigations on the subject of taboo. Freud criticises Wundt’s (1916) identification of the belief in the powers of demons as the earliest possible origin of taboo, objecting that demons are also creations of the human mind (Freud 1938: 826–827). However, he seems to share his conviction as to an evolution of the concept of taboo that would accompany the evolution of mankind.

Taboo is useful for the understanding of one of the areas that tells us more about the workings of the human mind, i.e. that of neurosis. According to Freud, both phenomena present some similarities with each other, which makes it a valuable and fruitful approximation, even if the similar features are to be found merely at surface level and not in the causes of both (Freud 1938: 827). For the purposes of the present work, the insights brought by this approximation are extremely enlightening, if not downright indispensable to the analysis of ads that use taboo as an advertising strategy. It helps us understand how sexuality and death can be combined into an effective advertising strategy in ads such as the one for Martini in Chapter Five.

A possible justification for the foregrounding of taboo – when, usually, taboo subjects are to be avoided – could be that taboos correspond to strong inner desires that have to be controlled by some repressive force if social order is to be

maintained. “The basis of taboo is a forbidden action for which there exists a strong inclination in the unconscious.” (Freud 1938: 832). In fact, and taking into account the distance that separates the more general character of the statement above from the situation where it will be applied, it could be used to describe the way these ads work for their target audience and the reaction they usually cause in the more traditionally-minded sectors of the public. This prohibited desire caused by certain types of taboo – for instance, evocation of eroticism or sex – accounts for its use in ads, always on the lookout for the most efficient means of attracting the audience’s attention (Cook 1992: 29–34). The target audience intended are usually those who are capable of recognising the taboo involved, capable of anticipating the feelings its depiction or invocation will arise in publics other than the target audience and, finally, capable of enjoying the risk of transgression – even if it is being done vicariously.

However, if the parallelism established by Freud enlightens an aspect that is present in some types of taboo, it still leaves out a number of others that cannot be accounted for in this manner. Therefore, this narrowing down of the definition makes it applicable only to a part of the present data, leaving out other important and widespread taboos – such as menstruation, but also certain bodily functions, disease or dirtiness, whose status of taboo cannot reasonably be explained in terms of hidden repressed desires.

### A working definition of taboo

After reviewing all these contributions from so many areas of learning on the subject of taboo, it is evident that we are faced with a hard task when trying to find a proper and comprehensive definition of the concept. This happens mainly because the word has been used to describe different phenomena:

Taboo is concerned (1) with all the social mechanisms of obedience which have ritual significance; (2) with specific and restrictive behaviour in dangerous situations.... (3) with the protection of individuals who are in danger, and (4) with the protection of society from those endangered – and therefore dangerous – persons. (Steiner [1965] 1999: 107–108).

As we can see, the possible connotations of the word embrace a wide range of social situations, which cannot be dealt with as if we were discussing a single phenomenon. Therefore, as in any other attempt to analyse a given sociological mechanism, it will be necessary here to settle on a definition of the concept that is attuned to its consensual meaning but also one that will encompass the specific situations discovered in this data.

A possible way of starting would be by a description of how taboo works. In the introductory chapter, a provisional delimitation of the term related it with certain types of behaviour in the face of danger. After reviewing the above theories on taboo, it is now possible to refine the explanation as to the way taboo acts. Steiner summarises it in the following manner:

...until taboos are involved, a danger is not defined and cannot be coped with by institutionalised behaviour.... Danger is narrowed down by taboo. A situation is regarded as dangerous: very well, but the danger may be a socially unformulated threat. Taboo gives notice that danger lies not in the whole situation, but only in certain specified actions concerning it. *These actions, these danger spots, are more deadly than the danger of the situations as a whole, for the whole situation can be rendered free from danger by dealing with or, rather, avoiding the specified danger spots completely....* The narrowing down and localisation of danger is the function of taboo of which we are now speaking. The dangerous situation is then defined in terms of such localisation, which in its turn is meaningless without abstentive behaviour. (Steiner [1956] 1999: 213–214, my italics)

These ideas seem to apply to all the taboos present in this selection. They all imply risks to the prevalent social patterns. Unruly sexual behaviours would be a threat to the institution of marriage and to the familial structure, and some ads are sometimes seen as a more or less veiled instigation to it – even if nowadays the degree of tolerance to such advertising strategies seems to be considerably higher than in the past.

Other taboos also signal risks for the community. Taboos related with marginality and border crossing can be understood in terms of a situation where the individual has no definite social standing (women during childbirth or menstruation, or unborn babies), which implies a problem of how to attribute these individuals a clear social standing. Whatever has to do with bodily transitions seems to pose the same kind of non-definition. Taboo covers all these areas as a protective cloak against the dangers that might occur in the above processes and the establishment of taboos provides us with the tools to deal with these dangers. Only after identifying them, can we deal with them, either by rejecting them totally or re-integrating them in organised society.

This *semblance of order* has to do with a concept of perfection, that of the individual and, correlatively, with that of society. Ideally, everyone and everything should behave and function according to the category they belong to. This ideal of a proper order of things lies behind the common sense morality by which some Benetton ads are condemned; or beyond our concern for thorough hygiene and disinfection in our households, or even beyond our slight sense of a topsy-turvy world when black people are portrayed as the “idle rich” in a Diesel ad. In all these instances, there is something out of place, or someone not behaving according to

the category imposed. This is a dimension of the religious that is present in our everyday life:

[H]oliness is exemplified by completeness. Holiness requires that individuals shall conform to the class to which they belong. And holiness requires that different classes of things shall not be confused. (Douglas 1966: 54).

This yearning for perfection and completeness can be equated with the ideal wholeness of God, which humans try to emulate: “To be holy is to be whole, to be one; holiness is unity, integrity, perfection of the individual and of the kind.” (Douglas 1966: 55). Thus, this idea of sacredness is always present – even if in our very secular manner, where the sacred appears to belong in a very different sphere to that of our daily existence. It was in order to maintain this sacredness that taboos were instituted; and still are, even today (Steiner [1956] 1999: 147).

This is how taboos function for individuals and in the everyday life of society. It would also be important to try to explain how they can function in advertising. Tentatively, we might say that (1) taboos that correspond to ‘hidden desires’ constitute a useful weapon in this area, in that ads can appeal to the taboo’s pleasant side in order to invoke positive associations with the product or service advertised. In this case, even the taboo’s negative side can be put to good use in some ads that cash in on a rebellious and outrageous attitude on the part of their target audience. This would account for the foregrounding of taboo. On the other hand, (2) taboos that only indicate danger spots but have no pleasant connotations constitute a problem for advertising, because their charge is primarily negative. In these cases, the function of the ad is usually to alleviate the taboo charge by concentrating on positive aspects of the after-use of the product. The solution is very often that of concentrating on the post-taboo, i.e. socially reintegrating capacities of the item advertised.

After this reflection on the functions of taboo in society and, more specifically, in advertising – a reflection which will be further developed over the next chapters – let us now settle on a definition of taboo that can function as an instrument of analysis of the data proposed for analysis. For the purposes of this book, ‘taboo’ corresponds to a number of restrictions that regulate some areas of social life, and that demand avoidance behaviour because (1) the situation is dangerous for the individual and (2) that danger could contaminate others. The danger involved usually corresponds to a threat to the established pattern of society, which tries to reproduce in its structure and in the behaviour of individuals an idea of wholeness and completeness. However, this connection to the sacred is not clearly visible in most cases, and sanctions for infringement of these taboos are apparently light and profane: embarrassment, private guilt, social criticism and social pressure – reactions that might have more to do with the sacred than might be expected at first.

This definition is wider than was strictly necessary for the study of the ads selected, and many taboos that could be analysed under the concept as it has been defined will be left out, mainly for reasons of space. However, it is better to take the risk of keeping the definition slightly vaguer than necessary than narrowing it down so much that it could become useless and unconnected to the primitive concept of taboo.

This definition still bears traces from most of the theories reviewed above. In fact, it can be described as a systematisation of Steiner's and Douglas's criticisms, revisions and rewritings of previous anthropological attempts of definition. The main reason for this choice has to do with the fact that both academics adopt a non-patronizing and respectful approach towards what is generally seen as *primitive*. This is the approach followed in this book. Taboos are not primitive at all, and can enlighten many areas in present life. One way of doing this is by studying ads as useful samples of the way "normal" society with its categories and divisions is seen nowadays. In the next chapter, some perspectives on advertising and the ways it can reflect taboos are analysed and discussed.

## CHAPTER 2

# Advertising

### Introduction

In Dorothy L. Sayers *Murder Must Advertise* we find a particularly apt opening note for the present chapter:

Mr Bredon had been a week with Pym's Publicity, and had learnt a number of things. He learned...that if, by the most far-fetched stretch of ingenuity, an indecent meaning could be read into a headline, that was the meaning that the great English Public would infallibly read into it (...). ([1933] 1989: 31–32)

This “indecent meaning” certainly corresponded to matters considered taboo: sexuality, bodily issues, or even dirty language. And, in an advertising agency of the 1930's, such as the one described in Sayers's *Murder Must Advertise*, taboo issues should not even be unwittingly referred to, let alone openly mentioned. Thus, special caution on this matter had to be observed both by copywriter and illustrator and when both parts of the print ad were put together. In fact, when carelessness of that type eventually happened, Pym's Publicity was saved in extremis from public shame by the prompt action of an elderly and experienced copywriter who knew how ruinous for the agency such a failure would be (Sayers [1933] 1989: 103–109).

This idea of a proper standard of *decency* that should be kept in advertising is still very much present in the legislation that regulates print ads in the United Kingdom today. We can find a number of restrictions that limit the public display of certain subjects:

#### ADVERTISING CODE – Decency

5.1. Advertisements should contain nothing that is likely to cause serious or widespread offence. *Particular care should be taken to avoid causing offence on the grounds of race, religion, sex, sexual orientation or disability.*

Compliance with the Codes will be judged on the context, medium, audience, product and prevailing standards of decency.

5.2. Advertisements may be distasteful without necessarily conflicting with 5.1. above. Advertisers are urged to consider public sensitivities before using potentially offensive material.

5.3. The fact that a particular product is offensive to some people is not sufficient grounds for objecting to an advertisement for it.<sup>1</sup>

Although in a less specific manner, Portuguese laws on advertising also regulate the content of ads on this subject. In the 7th Article of the *Código da Publicidade*, the Principle of Legality tells us that “All advertising is forbidden which, due to its form, object or aim, offends the fundamental and constitutionally consecrated values, principles and institutions.”<sup>2</sup> These values and principles are commonly understood to include human dignity, morality and decency. Complaints about transgressing ads (like Benetton’s, for instance) often base their arguments on the content of this principle.

The potential for “offence” is thus delimited according to established social taboos. An issue such as sex, for instance, has traditionally been considered a highly sensitive matter, as we have seen in the previous chapter. Even if “prevailing standards of decency” have been steadily enlarging to accommodate some daring incursions of advertising into taboo areas (Flick 1987: 539), there is always the notion that the taboo is there. In the cases where it is trespassed on, it happens because it is sometimes worth taking the risk of incurring in the corresponding social punishment.

### The functions of advertising

Advertising is one of the elements of the communication strategy of a brand, together with other instruments such as public relations, sales force, merchandising, promotions, sponsorship and direct marketing (Brochand et al [1993] (1999): 41). Several models were proposed for clearly defining the aims of advertising and for measuring its effects. The DAGMAR model sets a communication task for advertising actions, and describes four hierarchical stages in the communication process: (1) awareness, where the customer is first aware of the presence of the brand / product in the market; (2) comprehension, where the consumers understand the usefulness the product might present for them, (3) conviction, where a positive disposition towards the product is developed and (4) action, where the consumer

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1. *Advertising Code*, ‘Decency’ (on-line at [http://www.asa.org.uk/bcasp/r\\_5\\_1.htm](http://www.asa.org.uk/bcasp/r_5_1.htm)), my italics.

2. *Código da Publicidade* [Advertising code] (1991) in P. Q. José and A. C. R. Cruz (eds.) *Colectânea de Direito da Publicidade Anotada e Comentada* [Collected and commented legislation of advertising], Lisboa: Rei dos Livros.

acquires the product (Belch and Belch 2004: 206). Advertising, therefore, fulfils different functions, which can be described in the following manner:

Advertising is a variable that is adapted to large targets and, taken in isolation, has a medium / long term effect: it adapts itself to the different communication levels, but normally it is clearly oriented to the product, very often functioning as the pivotal element of the communication strategy; it adapts to goals such as *increasing awareness, stimulating acquisition, providing information* (provided the pieces of information are short [...]), or *presenting new products*. (Brochand et al [1993] (1999): 45, my translation)

As a part of their respective brand communication strategies, the ads selected for analysis in this book were meant to fulfil one or more of the functions mentioned above at the time they were broadcast. However, in this book they will be mainly studied under their role of vectors for taboo softening or taboo foregrounding, although mention of their other functions in the communication strategy is made whenever that proves relevant for their analysis.

### Taboo as an element in the communication strategy

From the earlier print ads where the facts about the product were the most important USPs<sup>3</sup> to the most recent ads by Benetton where the product is not even shown<sup>4</sup>, a number of taboo issues have been dealt with, avoided, indirectly mentioned or, in specific cases, foregrounded in order to benefit the image of the product or service in the minds of their target audience. When advertisers take upon themselves to discuss social problems rather than the superiority of their products when compared with others that are similar to them (Toscani 1995: 20–23), taboo issues are bound to be mentioned much more often, and with the aim of increasing social awareness. This process brings to commercial ads shock approaches borrowed from charity ads (Falk 1997: 70). A few of these charity ads are included in this selection, and more detailed explanations for the reasons for the inclusion of both commercial ads and charity ads can be found in the next chapter.

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3. USP stands for “Unique Selling Proposition”, a term coined by Rosser Reeves in *Reality in Advertising*. This concept presents three main features: (1) the ad must make a specific proposition to the customer, i.e. (2) a proposition that makes the product or brand different from its competitors and (3) that is powerful enough to convince the consumers that start using your brand or product. (Belch and Belch 2004: 256)

4. It is important to mention that the function of Benetton’s shocking approaches is not primarily that of lending an USP to their products, but rather that of increasing brand awareness by drawing the audience’s attention to these ads.



Reference to taboo can be deliberate and, when it happens, it fulfils an important function as to the type of connotations that the advertiser wants the viewer to associate with the product (Bonney and Wilson [1983] 1990: 192–193; Goddard 1998: 206). In this situation, the taboos invoked are usually those connected with sex and eroticism, which bring to an innocuous product such as a perfume or a car an aura of “safe” – because virtual – transgression and defiance of established social institutions such as marriage or religion (MacCannell 1987: 527–531; Cook 1992: 106; MacRury 1997: 249–251). These taboos would then be the ones for which there is an element of desire or pleasure in the mind of the individual, as we have seen in the previous chapter.

Advertising is always ready to make use of the most unlikely materials (Cook 1992: 34), even those that, apparently, could seem harmful for their purpose (Williamson 1978: 165, 174). Therefore, it is quick in trying to define the product in terms of such forbidden and attractive connotations that will function as an added value to the factual reality of the product (Myers 1999: 8; 30). This associative characteristic of advertising has been widely studied, usually in terms of the consensual positive values it tries to associate with what is being advertised (Williamson 1978: 30–31, 47, 161; Vestergaard and Schroder 1985: 152–156; Wernick 1997: 220). Apparently negative connotations that will appeal to the right audience and, probably, alienate the unintended ones, have also merited some attention (Falk 1997: 77–81). Further insights as to how advertising in general uses taboo as a strategy and how this strategy is seen as the right one for that particular product will be advanced in this book.

As to the ways ads have to deal with taboo matters associated with the products or services, there is no systematic study of how they solve that difficulty. However, some writers from different areas of knowledge have dealt with specific taboo issues and the way they have been treated in ads (among others Vestergaard and Schroder 1985: 82–83, 90–91, 94–95, 141–145, 160; Kloepper 1987: 128–129; Myers 1994: 113–115, 118–120, 142–145, 170–187; Sibley 1995: 19–21, 65–67; Falk 1997: 70–81; Jobling 1997: 157–175; Fowles 1996: 45; Twitchell 1996: 33, 142–149; Ivinski 2000: 108–115). This book analyses a wider range of taboos that are often present in advertising. These often go unnoticed because of the apparent banality of the product (household detergents or toilet rolls, for example), the apparently unimaginative approach of the ad, or even the specific target audience intended (very often housewives)<sup>5</sup>. These are not the ads that win publicity awards. However, they are the ones that occupy the largest part of the commercial breaks and,

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5. One of the reasons why these ads do not normally attract much attention is that the diversion strategies they use are effective and the viewers' attention is distracted from their taboo content.

therefore, the ones we see most often (Brierley 1995: 10). Obviously, they are effective; otherwise, more flashy approaches would have been designed a long time ago. They are certainly worthy of more critical and academic attention than what they have been getting.

### Taboo in advertising?

Even though taboos have not been a primary area of research in academic studies of advertising, the works mentioned in this chapter contribute to the further enlightenment of the subject mostly in some of the points debated during the analysis of specific ads. This focussing on taboo issues will necessarily make this chapter concentrate on some parts of the most influential works on advertising and leave out other themes debated in them that are normally considered to be the most important for the understanding of this phenomenon.

The review of the most relevant works for this book comprises references to works on advertising that, even though not presenting discussions of taboo ads, provide a model and working tools for the type of analysis that will be applied to the present data, as well as a summary of scattered references and brief analysis of ads that tackle taboo issues that can be found in several works about advertising. Those insights are organised around the main themes that categorise this selection of ads: (1) bodily functions and disease, in that they interfere with the specific categories that are used to classify individuals in society; (2) dirtiness and bad language, in that they imply a defiling and polluting potential. This grouping will correspond to a slightly heteroclitic structure as to the chronological order of the works reviewed, or even the school of thought behind each of the approaches. Therefore, in order to provide a background in which to insert each work reviewed, some brief background explanations are given for the work in question.

A number of works on advertising reflect upon the use of taboo issues as a strategy adopted by some ads. Once again, this type of reflection appears as a sort of by-issue or afterthought. The resource to such a strategy is often used as an argument against commercial advertising, on the grounds of indecency, disrespect for social proprieties or even appeal to baser instincts. The examples discussed here have to do with eroticism and sex, in that they can disrupt traditional institutions in society.

### A framework for the analysis of taboo ads

Ads deliberately play on the interface of many tokens of meaning: words (written and spoken), image, and music. An analysis that concentrates exclusively on one of these aspects will certainly miss many significant elements, while it blows others out of proportion<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, ads should not be treated in a context-less manner, but as increasingly more sophisticated objects meant to interact with receivers, who actively react and construct meanings through them (Cook 1992: 3; Myers 1999: 213).

This dynamic and interactive perspective on the way ads function and relate with their audience is a way to overcome the major deficiencies of other approaches where the study of the written text in the ad is paramount and other conveyers of meaning such as visuals or music are left out (Grunig 1990; Dahlet 1985; Preston and Scharbach 1971; Preston 1967; Pons-Ridler 1994); or even the definite character and patronising tone assumed by some semiotic interpretations of ads, where the academic reader appears as the only one in a position to see through the falsehoods concocted by the devious minds of advertisers – which leads to the rigidity of analytical processes and presupposes the existence of a unique “correct” way of interpreting (Williamson 1978; Geis 1982).

Mere semantic description and univocal semiotic approaches such as the ones referred to above are not sufficient to account for connotation and emotion. That is the ad’s ultimate battlefield, especially when dealing with taboo issues that involve deep feelings and often unsuspected connections with spiritual areas, as we have seen in the previous chapter. This area of indeterminacy and appeal to emotion which ads play upon contributes to the creation of an atmosphere of shared knowledge and assumed intimacy between the *I* in the ad and the *I* of the viewer (Cook 1992: 172), making it easier to discuss taboo subjects, even if they are usually referred to through euphemisms. In such a context, it is presumably easier to admit to sharing some “indecent” or “anti-social” hidden needs that some ads specialise in making appear so glamorous.

Connotation in advertising, i.e., the different feelings, images and emotions that a viewer, in a more or less subjective manner, associates with what is factually present in the ad, is an especially relevant study field. As we have seen, contemporary advertising does not work by means of factual description of products and services but by trying to associate feelings to them to create an immediate identification between

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6. With a choice of data similar to the present one, Cook’s *The Discourse of Advertising* (1992) proposes a study of contemporary Western ads. His study is based on discourse analysis but tries to take into account the multiple interactions of layers of meaning that characterizes ads nowadays. In doing so, it exemplifies the practical difficulties of tackling the analysis of complex contemporary ads as a whole, a problem that also had to be dealt with in this book.

product and feeling in the mind of the viewer (Leech 1974: 13; Williamson 1978: 30–31). This strategy is certainly helpful and effective for ads in general, especially because it allows for differentiation between products that are, in fact, very similar (Williamson 1978: 24; Dyer 1982: 8–9; Cook 1992: 10–11)<sup>7</sup>.

Ads burdened with taboo-related products usually try at all costs to distract the viewers' attention from taboo, and the association of the product with unambiguous positive feelings would be a good way of achieving that goal (Freitas 2004a: 157). Ads with non-taboo products that deliberately resort to taboo do so in order to associate to their products feelings that are more or less socially condemnable. However, as we have seen in the previous chapter, they correspond to areas of secret fascination because they are usually forbidden.

Assimilation between the product and the feelings intended is often achieved by the use of metaphor or other related tropes such as metonymy (Myers 1994: 122–134; Citelli 1986: 20–22; Cook 1992: 104–108). In contemporary ads, the metaphoric relationship can be textual and, increasingly, also visual (Forceville 1996). Once again, the devices such as verbal and visual metaphors, which are so commonly used in every type of ad, become especially significant when the issue is taboo. Images can be less compromising and less definite than words, helping in situating the ad in that area of indeterminacy and vagueness which (1) obliterates the sharper edges of taboo products and (2) allows for safe escapes from direct accusations of indecency when the approach is deliberately made through taboo.

The study of the visual links between fact and subjective interpretations of it, as they appear in advertising, is an essential part of this type of analysis (Forceville 1996)<sup>8</sup>. Verbal metaphors are the basis upon which the concept of pictorial metaphor is construed:

In a verbal metaphor, part of the statement draws on the literal, conventional use of language. This part of the metaphor is called its 'frame'. The part of the metaphorical statement used non-conventionally is called the 'focus'. A metaphor contains, in principle, two subjects. The literal, conventional subject, which by definition always belongs to the frame, is labelled its 'primary subject'; the metaphorical

7. In his work, Cook analyses several ads whose internal structure is based on this associative strategy. Even though none of them deals directly with taboo issues, it is certainly possible to extend that analysis to an area that has so much to gain from this strategy.

8. Forceville's work does not present any analysis of ads concerned with taboo issues. However, most of the ads in the present selection use some kind of pictorial metaphor that will be analysed under the light of Forceville's theory. Even though it starts from a Relevance Theory perspective (Sperber and Wilson 1986), it can be applied to a semiotic-oriented perspective such as this one, in that it will be used as a working tool in the practical analysis of data. For that purpose, abundant use of the definitions provided by Forceville will be made. These are based on a revised version of Black's (1979), and Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) ideas.

subject, which by definition is or belongs to the focus, is called its 'secondary subject'. Each of the subjects is a 'system of things'. This is taken to mean that it labels a complex network of properties or features. (Forceville 1996: 38)

This structure is also the one that can be found in pictorial metaphors. However, this dislocation from verbal to pictorial implies a more complex identification of the components mentioned in the quotation above. When we are in the presence of a verbal metaphor, the sequence of words immediately helps in establishing the primary and secondary subject, from which frame and focus can be deduced (Forceville 1996: 122), whereas in pictorial metaphors, some preliminary questions must be settled before concluding which of the subjects is to be primary and which is secondary:

What are the two terms of the metaphor and how do we know? Which is the metaphor's primary subject and how do we know? Which is the metaphor's primary subject and what its secondary subject and how do we know? What can be said about the feature(s) mapped from secondary subject onto primary subject? (Forceville 1996: 73)

This lack of immediacy in the interpretation of pictorial metaphors is partly due to the complexity of a creative process of approximation between apparently dissimilar items, and to our difficulty in reading images as if they were text i.e., according to a grammar that fixates meanings and systematizes visual conventions (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996). Contemporary advertising relies heavily on visuals to convey meanings. Very often, it combines image and words in a way to better transmit its message (Huyghe 1955: 46; Péninou 1972: 98; Cook 1992: 38; Forceville 1996: 78). The "extra-loaded" character assumed by ad texts can be strongly reinforced by images. Sometimes, it happens that images are central and the text emphasizes or contradicts their content (Barthes 1977; Pateman 1980). This emphasis on image in contemporary society and, more specifically, in advertising, creates the need of a new type of literacy of the visual, which is the purpose of *Reading Images*:

We intend to provide inventories of the major compositional structures which have become established as conventions in the course of the history of visual semiotics, and to analyse how they are used to produce meaning by contemporary image-makers. (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 1).

In the present book, the existing insights from works on visual literacy are used and adapted to the analysis of occurrences of taboo in images. Pictorial metaphors are abundantly used in ads, and for their interpretation in terms of hidden and foregrounded taboo issues it will also be essential to understand how given elements in images are usually understood and interpreted. It is often on these conventions that advertisers rely in order to convey issues that are best not mentioned

in words. As we have seen, taboo meanings in images cannot be as easily challenged or accused of indecency or bad taste as words in a similar situation would.

Different factors influence the way external influence is perceived (i.e. received, selected, organised and interpreted) by the consumers:

Perception is an individual process; it depends on internal factors such as a person's beliefs, experiences, needs, moods, and expectations. The perceptual process is also influenced by the characteristics of a stimulus (such as its size, color and intensity) and the context in which it is seen or heard. (Belch and Belch 2004: 113)

All these factors will then affect interpretation of pictorial metaphors in terms of taboo reading, and will also help decide which elements will be selectively retained.

Of special interest is the study of the different features of the picture that can yield information about the position of the viewer and its relationship with what is represented in the picture, namely the correspondence between the size of frame in pictures and social distance (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 130). This point is deliberately manipulated in ads in order to convey given meanings and, especially so in taboo-related ads, where proximity and familiarity between viewer and the *I* in the ad is, as will be demonstrated in the next chapters, a commonly used strategy. The point of view or angle from which the picture is taken can also give information to the viewer about the attitude of the photographer to the scene depicted. If we take the interpretation further, as we must when the issue is advertising, there can be useful information as to the socially correct attitude about certain issues. These are clearly important insights when dealing, for instance, with ads for sanitary protection products.

Modality in images i.e., their reliability and "reality" can be conveyed by features such as colour, settings, perspective, illumination or even brightness (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 159–180). Elements such as these have to be taken into account in order to understand the worlds created in the images of advertising and the way viewers are expected to read them, since,

modality is 'interpersonal' rather than 'ideational'. It does not express absolute truths or falsehoods; it *produces* shared truths aligning readers or listeners with some statements and distancing them from others. It serves to create an imaginary 'we'. (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 160)

Construing this *we* is essential for the sharing of what is intimate, embarrassing, or socially condemnable. That is usually the aim of taboo ads, in that they appear to restrict their target audience to a select group of viewers – which, plus the *I* of the ad, form the *we*. They are the ones who fully understand the ad and understand the others in the same group. As we have seen, metaphors (verbal or visual) are a way

of reinforcing the identification of the *I* in the ad as one of the *we* group. As Cook points out,

the important and foregrounded fusion of product with user, situation or effect is more usually achieved through pun, connotation or metaphor, rather than through any logical or sequential connection in the world. (1992: 155)

The way the ad is graphically composed is also a form of conveying information. Even more importantly, it determines the amount of information given at each point as the viewer scans the ad. Elements such as margins and centre, the left / right, top / bottom disposition and their relationship with the Given and the New, i.e., what is already known and will function as a frame, and what is unknown until then and the image (in this case, the ad) will present as innovation (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 181–229) have to be taken into consideration in the analysis of taboo ads, since it is a case where the amounts of Given and New information have to be carefully weighed because susceptibilities are involved.

In ads for taboo products, the Given elements are usually foregrounded in order to convey intimacy and common knowledge, and the New are often connected with technological innovations which are “embellished”. This is often the case with ads for sanitary protection products or household detergents. In ads for non-taboo products that use taboo approaches, the New elements are often salient, in order to achieve the intended shock effect, and the Given ones are present so as to allow a proper background to the innovation. Ads for cars, perfumes or even for some charities often use this type of distribution of informational elements. The concept of “information chain”, as applied to the dialogue in ads between given and new data (Cook 1992: 172–175), establishes a linguistic progression of gradually acquired knowledge, which is similar in functioning to Kress and van Leeuwen’s Given / New relationship in images. In fact, both linguistic and visual elements can combine in this process of making lighter an excessive taboo charge.

### **How ads deal with taboo issues**

In academic works on advertising, it is sometimes possible to come across ads for taboo products or services, or ads with deliberately intended taboo implications. However, the analysis of these ads is not usually made in terms of their taboo content, or in such a way as to study how taboo is underplayed or foregrounded by linguistic and/or visual devices. It is more common to find an analysis focussed on ideological issues that might have influenced the making of the ad. These issues are, for instance, the status of women in society, the changes in the way traditional values are seen, or even the way certain taboo products have been advertised



throughout the years. This section is a summarised review of the ways taboo ads have been seen by writers on advertising.

Even though most of the analyses below have a different focus from the one used in this book, their perspective complements the one that is used here, in that linguistics and visuals do not function in an isolated manner. If they are used in an effective manner in advertising, it is because they keep up with social developments and accompany the changes in ideology.

### **Bodily issues and disease in ads**

As we have already seen in the previous chapter, matters that have to do with bodily emissions and excretions are the ones that usually cause unmitigated feelings of taboo. They become “things out of place” once they have crossed the boundaries of the body (Douglas [1975] 1999: 112). They menace the body’s integrity and wholeness, in the same way as disease does. It makes the affected body hover between a healthy state – which functions as a desirable referential condition – and the threat of death, which the disease apparently anticipates.

Academic books that are also concerned with ads that represent the way women are considered in society (among others, Vestergaard and Schroder 1985), sometimes accentuate the appeal to normality present in most ads for sanitary protection. Women should behave as if nothing was happening, according to “idealised images of femininity” (1985: 142). This normality at all cost is imposed by society on women in such a way that it assumes women should make a pretence even to themselves of feeling as they do on every other day. This mechanism of implied behaviour expectations, apart from suppressing the free experiencing of a natural body function, also makes menstruation more of a taboo (1985: 143) partly because of social pressure.

Another relevant issue when discussing women’s role in society is the importance of peer pressure in the enforcement of several ideas usually taken for granted, namely the conviction that (facial) body hair is highly undesirable in women and can even lead to a more or less covert situation of ostracism. A print ad for an electrolysis treatment that promises to put an end to the problem of unwanted hair (analysed in Vestergaard and Schroder 1985: 82–83) presents an opening line, under the form of a question, which immediately places the ad in the realm of taboos and how they should be avoided: “Do other people talk about the hair you don’t want to talk about?”. It immediately takes for granted that body hair is a taboo for the reader, since she does not even wish to discuss it. It assumes it is a taboo for everyone else that surrounds her, since they will talk about it but in a secretive, gossipy way. This furtive manner is very aptly illustrated in the image of the ad, which goes even further on the maintenance of taboo. The woman with the



unwanted body hair does not show her face – presumably, where the unwanted hair would be – and the two gossiping women literally talk about it behind her back, comparing her disadvantageously to an ideal concept of female beauty. The instillation of a sense of being inferior due to social pressure (Goffman [1963] 1968) is, therefore, the strategy used by this ad.

A relevance theory-based pragmatic study of ads in Britain and Japan (Tanaka 1994) dedicates some attention to a series of two sanitary protection print ads for the same brand, where an apparently optimistic and liberating caption corresponds, when juxtaposed with the accompanying image, to a foregrounding of what is more negative and stereotypical about the way women are still often seen in society (1994: 123–125). This type of liberating promise that is, after all, trivialised or denied when the ad is scrutinised in more detail, often happens with ads for this type of product. The study about of this strategy in Chapter Six develops these insights even further and elaborates on the complementary functions of language, visuals and sounds for this purpose.

Some products related with very specific issues present a serious problem for the advertiser because they deal with traditional taboos. Even more than with menstruation, that is the case with condoms, especially after the advent of AIDS. This disease, usually (and erroneously) seen as a synonym of immediate death, complicates the advertising of the only artefact that can prevent the infection during sexual intercourse, thereby adding to the product's taboo of connection with illicit sex. This connotation is analysed in a study on the evolution in the form of advertising of a product that presents a special situation with respect to its taboo readings, which is reflected in the uncomfortable relationship advertising has always had with it (Jobling 1997: 157). The hint of libertinage associated with the product in the 18th century was visible in the euphemisms people used to refer it. The widespread advertising of condoms in the press from the 60s to the 90s was subject to decency rules, a fact that is telling as to the heavy taboo charge involved. By then, the product was being marketed mainly as a contraceptive method. However, the pill, which began to be widely used in the 70s, was gradually replacing condoms, mainly because of the simplicity of its use and increased reliability. Contemporary ads for condoms try to rehabilitate them from negative connotations of obtrusiveness and awkwardness, in order to transform them into something desirable and fashionable. Now, apart from mentioning its unique abilities as a protection from contagion, ads have to be advertised in terms of enhancer of sexual pleasure, a fact that forces taboo ads to talk openly about sexual taboos:

Condom advertising, therefore, in common with tobacco advertising, runs counter to the promotion of most other products, exhorting us to think seriously about the implications of corporeal pleasure and confronting us with our own mortality. (Jobling 1997: 157–158).

The way AIDS warnings are conveyed by means of advertising made by official institutions is also analysed in books on the linguistic functioning of ads (Myers 1994: 170–187). In ads of this type, it is obviously necessary to indicate safer sexual practices, in order to minimise the risks of acquiring the disease and “one difficulty in including any specific information about safer sex is that talk about condoms or masturbation or penetration or semen or vaginal fluids challenges taboos.” (Myers 1994: 174). Taboos about bodily issues *and* sexual taboos *and* disease plus death taboos. These are heavy burdens indeed, and it is understandable that a number of strategies are employed to overcome them.

However, strategies of vagueness and reticence usually connected with other taboos like menstruation, for instance, are reversed in this case, due to the extremely serious nature of the disease involved. There is the need to show or talk about the product that can protect people from infection. The trend seems to be the rendering of the message in simple and colloquial language and avoiding vagueness (Myers 1994: 174–175). It is clearly a case where the higher interests of public health clearly outdo respect for taboos, traditional as they may be.

In accordance with this tendency of avoiding vagueness and indirection, condoms often make an appearance in these ads. However, another major problem seems to be connected with the linguistic and visual representations of condoms. For this, different approaches have been tried, in order to effectively convince people that they are necessary. One of them is being technical and providing clear answers to people’s doubts, which is the preferred approach in printed information by public health agencies; the other is using humour (whether coyly or openly) to make condoms closer, more familiar and easier to talk about (Myers 1994: 176–177). This is a common strategy in television ads, especially when the targets are young people. Both strategies are widely used for sexualising the condom and render the inevitable references to disease more positive. The emphasis is usually on the living quality one can have (with the condom), and not so much on the certainty of dying (when having sex without it)<sup>9</sup>.

Benetton’s advertising and the way they deal with the issues of disease and death is often the subject of academic analysis (among others Falk 1997)<sup>10</sup>. In using the image where a young man with AIDS has just died surrounded by his family

9. Myers’s approach to the analysis of this type of ads resembles the one that will be applied to the present data. His insights on the special relationship ads for AIDS have to maintain with taboos will be particularly relevant for the ads selected regarding this subject.

10. Falk’s concern is the stretching of conventional limits of morality and decency in contemporary advertising. Even though the present study will be only dealing with the controversial and widely known Benetton ads in a cursory manner – for reasons explained in the next chapter – Falk’s ideas on the subject present relevant contributions for this book, especially for the analysis of ads that resort to taboo as an advertising strategy.

for their ad, Benetton claims to be fulfilling a double purpose, which is that of helping to increase the sales of their clothes, and also contributing towards alerting people to social problems. In this case, Benetton's advertising is using a shock approach based on the real depiction of the ultimate taboo in advertising, i.e. death.

This corresponds to the will to subvert the typical advertising universe, where euphoric values are uppermost, and replace it with a series of ads connected by fears shared by us all (Falk 1997: 77). These would include AIDS, war, terrorism, destruction of nature and pollution, among others. All of them present more or less obvious links to taboo, in that they imply risks for personal integrity and risky behaviour, as mentioned in Chapter One. By confronting the viewer with these ever-present threats of modern life, it is Benetton's conviction that people will act more, and not just lie back, lured into a sense of false security by the harmonic world represented in traditional ads (Toscani 1995).

However, this shock effect is carefully controlled by the advertiser. Even though Benetton very often uses pictures that were taken for documentary purposes, they are more or less subtly retouched. Falk points out that

Benetton's catastrophic imagery...is constructed according to the rules of balanced composition with controlled colour grading and accurately framed close-ups. ... My argument is not that these images evoke only pure aesthetic reflection; they certainly also evoke a variety of other emotions. However, the aesthetic and spectacular element remains an aspect of the effect which contributes to the reproduction of the basic split keeping the spectator-consumer safe. (Falk 1997: 79)

This means that the taboo effect achieved is even more real than the real one, as it would appear in an actual picture, since it was the aim of the advertiser to focus the viewer's attention on it as much as possible. At the same time, this doctoring of the picture makes it an aesthetic object to contemplate, even if its subject is intrinsically disagreeable.

This fact re-introduces a measure of safe distance between observers and observed. This distance that might be endangered with the depiction of taboo, but it is in fact preserved by the status of 'artistic picture' that many of these ads make use of.

This aestheticization of ads that explore the taboo angle deliberately – a part of which would correspond to a newly established tradition begun with Benetton's ads (Falk 1997: 79–81) – can be also found, albeit in a different manner, in ads that try to hide the taboo readings inherent to their products. Very often, they displace the focus of their ads to areas other than taboo, attributing to them a sort of hyper-real status, which almost obliterates what is taboo in them. Some of these ads and strategies used will be discussed in the sections below.

## The polluting potential of dirtiness and bad language in ads

Dirtiness, considered as disorder in social patterns, is also a source of taboo. As we have seen in the previous chapter, it interferes with the patterns that rule social life. In fact, it is rather more than just fear of bacteria or concern for the cleanness of the household that moves us to tidy up or to put things back in the places we attributed to them. It is the need to categorise things and to align them along specific grooves that help us make sense of experience (Douglas [1975] 1999: 109). What is clean (and straight, clear, well-defined) should not mix with what is dirty (and polluted, confused, and unclassified).

Because of their products' connection to dirt and its implications of impurity and pollution – which reach areas beyond the physical aspect – ads for products such as household detergents, cleaning products or washing powders often use diverting strategies, which apparently distract the viewer's attention from the taboo. However, what they do is to displace the interpretation of dirt as something physical and palpable (which is what the product will take care of in a more or less efficient way) to concepts of moral purity or uncleanness. By buying product X, the consumer's clothes will be whiter, but his inner self will also be cleaner and free of dirt spots, i.e. disturbing elements.

Some people are excluded and marginalized by more powerful sectors of society because of an ideal concept of purity, which leads them to “clean” the spaces they feel threaten organised social life (Sibley 1995).<sup>11</sup> Sibley provides a striking example of the way Mary Douglas' works on defilement and pollution (1966; [1975] 1999) can be put to good use in the analysis of very recent and ever-changing data such as contemporary ads. Sibley's analysis of an ad for Persil (1995: 64–67) shows that being clean is where the virtue lies, and is a sign of belonging to the “right” side of society:

The children are portrayed as ‘naturally’ wild but it is clear that Persil is a civilizing influence, a necessary commodity in the suburban home, contributing to the creation of a purified environment in which children behave according to standards set by adults. The family home is a setting for a struggle against dirt and natural wilderness. Consumption is encouraged by suggesting the undesirability of the soiled and polluted. (1995: 64)

The above passage summarises the connection between the physical and the spiritual in the issue of dirt. It also refers to a commonly explored strategy in ads for

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11. David Sibley's *Geographies of Exclusion* (1995) is an important reference to the present study, mainly for two reasons. Among analyses of other situations of social exclusion, it presents a study of ads for household detergents in terms of spiritual purification that corroborates initial intuitive opinions on the subject experienced before the beginning of the present project.

household and bodily cleaning products: the use of children. As we will see in some of the ads analysed in the forthcoming chapters, they are a very effective way of distracting attention from the most unpleasant aspects of taboo and allow a depiction of the way the products act that would not be possible with grown-ups. Also, children have a sort of universal appeal that makes people pay attention to ads that are usually considered to be boring and repetitive.

Bad language can function as an element that characterises a marginal status and something that offends against purity and appropriateness of language. Alternative, “dirty” words are used to categorise what should be described in clean and proper language. Hence their taboo potential, which can be put to good use in ads when the intention is to shock. This point will be further discussed during the analysis of ads that successfully resort to that strategy.

Visual elements play a crucial role in contemporary ads. Ads often deliberately aim to seduce the viewer by showing images of pleasure and delight that seem out of proportion with the product advertised. According to this view, in an analysis of a television commercial for Dixan washing powder (analysed in González Requena and Ortiz de Zárate 1995: 105–112), two levels of interpretation are possible. One of these would be semiotic – which corresponds to the factual reality of a shirt being washed by this detergent – and an imaginary or delirious one, where the whiteness of the newly-washed shirt sends the woman into ecstasies, and where it is possible to enter the washing machine in order to see how the product works on the shirt (1995: 104–105). These two levels are always linked and the viewer is constantly seduced into entering the imaginary plane by a series of rhetorical devices that create suspense, such as ellipsis and ambiguity, both in linguistic and visual terms. Also, the reason for the woman’s extreme enjoyment – the whiteness of the shirt – is only very gradually revealed, which keeps the viewer waiting for the confirmation of something already suspected. In the delirious level, several interpretations are possible to justify such an extreme reaction to such a commonplace action. Among the possibilities of interpretation, the most relevant is that the shirt could function as a symbol for the skin,

whose defining property is that of being unique, i.e. it has the ability of delimiting the individual, separating him from the world as well as modelling him as an identity different from all the others, in the same way the experiences we receive through our skin are diverse. This shirt/skin is ever-desirable... ever-continuous, without holes, dirt spots or blemishes, never weather-beaten, perforated or bloodied: all in all, impervious to time and definite token of the wholeness of the body. (González Requena and Ortiz de Zárate 1995: 110–111, my translation)

This interpretation corroborates the possibility of the reading of material cleanliness as a symbol of spiritual and moral purity (Sibley 1995). The washing of dirty

spots in clothes in a more efficient manner, as promised by every detergent in the market, brings with it, in the delirious level of the ad, the conviction that the soul of one who wears those spotless clothes is immaculate as well.

An ad analysis from Kloepfer (1987) can also be mentioned in this section. This author presents some important notions for the present work, namely the idea that there are aesthetic implications in every stage of advertising, which can be characterised as a double-channelled communicative device between advertiser and future consumer that can influence purchase decisions (Kloepfer 1987: 123–124). This aestheticising trend could be effectively studied by semiotics, in an investigation of the sign as something that acts upon the person as a whole, and not just on separate sensorial levels (Kloepfer 1987: 124) – a stage that semiotic studies such as this one are trying to reach by taking into account conveyors of meaning other than textual language. This complementation of the study of the sign in ads (named “sympraxis” by the author) should comprehend “all modifications of consciousness achieved by the use of signs, from alarm to astonishment, from interest to well-being, from fascination to ironic distance, from identification to a superior smile of acceptance.” (Kloepfer 1987: 125). This redefinition of the sign is necessary in order to keep pace with advertising in its present state, since “all over the world it is becoming less and less mimetic (that is, representational/referential/informative in the narrow sense) and more and more sympratic (that is, involving/sensuous/phatic/creatively engaged).” (Kloepfer 1987: 125). The author applies the idea of “emotional evocation” (based on Peirce’s definition) to a non-commercial television ad by Greenpeace, which used an approach considered provocative in France and was therefore banned (Kloepfer 1987: 129). This ad presents a special case of taboo approach to a taboo subject. The angle chosen was not mimetic. We do not actually see furry animals being killed and skinned to make fur coats. However, the effect achieved was much more disturbing for the viewers in that, in a scenery of haute-couture and refinement, blood suddenly starts dripping from the fur coat of the model on the catwalk, splashes the audience and finally covers the floor. Blood appears here as “something out of place”, and the ad gets its shock value from the blunt display of that taboo. In an atmosphere whose only purpose is aestheticisation (fashion), non-aestheticised crude matters are suddenly introduced and strong, unmediated feelings come to the surface. Firstly, those of the public in the fashion show and, secondly, those of the viewers of the ad, whose reaction is anticipated by the micro-audience inside the ad. Kloepfer’s insights are also relevant for other ads that use different strategies to

omit taboo, namely the ones referred to in the section below, which depend on the viewer's capacity of ascribing to the signs used the meanings intended:

The closeness of [sympraxis] to the magical use of signs can be seen in the way the recipient experiences at the signs' direction something incredibly witty, astonishingly simple, or erotically enticing which he then, seemingly of his own accord, assigns to the product (or the producer). (Kloepfer 1987: 125)

As we can see, all these taboos present possibilities of connection between themselves. There is much fear of dirtiness in a bodily taboo such as menstruation, or even sexual taboos. The alien person is often seen as dirty, impure and unfit to live with us side by side. Condoms are a good example of a combination of taboos, especially nowadays, where they must be advertised in terms of sex, bodily issues and fear of disease and death, as we will see in the section below. This summary of insights on the subject of taboo ads functions as a complement to the analyses of ads in the next chapters. Scattered and limited as it is, it offers new perspectives on the way ads relate to society. It also offers the possibility of discussing the principles underlying contemporary ads that have already become classics (like the Benetton ad with the dying AIDS patient David Kirby) which have not been included in this selection of ads.

### **When taboo is an advertising strategy**

As we have seen, ads sometimes use deliberate references to taboo in order to achieve some intended effects. References to eroticism and sex are perhaps one of the most common strategies used, and they are also the subject of a number of reflections and analyses on the part of academia as to what materials advertising uses and how far it will go to serve its purposes. Sex in ads has been traditionally understood as a repository of possible references that advertisers resort to whenever necessary. For that, sex is "always hinted at, referred to, in innuendo, double entendre, or symbolism." (Williamson 1978: 120). Based on Lévi-Strauss' dichotomy of "raw" and "cooked" (1964), Williamson stresses the "cooked" quality of the sexual references found in ads, i.e. they are submitted to a transformation that allows them to fulfil the exact role they are meant to play in the economy of the ad.

This traditional perspective sees this appropriation of sex for the purposes of advertising as yet another deception played upon the viewer, among the many manipulative actions for which it is responsible. In a well-known analysis by Williamson of an ad for MG, the first sexual innuendo lies in the ambiguous use of the pronoun "it" in the title sentence "You can do it in an MG", which, in conjunction with the picture of a car and a couple in the background, makes the viewer replace



“it” by “sex”. This possible interpretation is further confirmed by the closing sentence in the copy: “When you’re behind the wheel of an MG you’re driving a true thoroughbred”, which also contains a sexual innuendo. In this double ambiguity (it = acceleration rate of the car / have sex; driving a horse or a car = having sexual intercourse), can be found evidence of a double “cooking”, i.e. of a transformation that takes what was natural in the first place, processes it in terms of cultural concepts and metaphors, and hands it back to the viewer under the appearance of the utmost naturalness (1978: 121).

Another classical example analyses the positioning of the elements in the ad and the implications in terms of taboo reading those relative positions can have. In a print ad for Mini, the title sentence reads “Sex has never been a problem for us”. Placed as it is inside the area occupied by the picture of a couple that looks relaxed and happy as they look at each other, this sentence can be read as the caption to the image and as a statement about a happy sexual life. However, the fact that the sentence is formed by written words makes the reader interpret them as being a part of the block of text below the image, where the taboo reading is finally diluted in a context that firmly directs interpretation to the correct choice of “car for men and for women”. Thus, the title sentence functions as a sort of pivotal axis in the ad (Williamson 1978: 85), around which taboo meanings are hinted at or denied. This reading becomes especially relevant when combined with the more recent work by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) on the grammar of visual elements. By applying their systematisations to the analysis of ads, it is possible to take this line of exploration displayed in Williamson even further – something that will be demonstrated in the chapters dedicated to the detailed study of the ads.

More recent works that deal with the presence of deliberate sexual hints in ads also choose examples of car ads. This fact is more than a mere coincidence. Cars have traditionally been seen as extensions of male virility (a notion cleverly explored in one of the ads that will be discussed in one of the next chapters); as a powerful way of attracting beautiful women; and as a privileged place for teenage or extra-marital sex. Cars are sexy, and it is accepted that they are often marketed in terms of sex. As a confirmation to this, three car ad analyses were found which, at first sight, would seem to correspond to narratives about adultery (MacRury 1997). However, they go against the expectations of sex taboos created in the viewer by finally revealing the protagonists’ innocence and faithfulness to their respective partners.

Unlike what happens in classical academic works on advertising, more recent analyses are focussed on the way viewers use the content of ads for their own purposes. The people that actually see the ad interpret it in forms that go far beyond the strict categorisations and meanings yielded by a careful and methodological dissection of every sign in the ad (Myers 1999: 14; Pinto 1997: 10). The frame cre-



ated by the ad is not as coercive and deceptive as academic criticism would have us believe, nor are the viewers so easily conditioned and duped by the strategies used in ads. In the correlation ads establish between material goods and feelings, they allow for the fulfilment of certain social needs, other than the strict need to satisfy consumerist impulses.

That is the case with these three ads for cars, all of which resort to hints of extra-marital affairs. They are adapted to specific target consumers by means of the use of different rhetorical strategies in each of them. Only the means used to define the exact target are different. It could be said that each target audience needs a slightly different taboo fantasy, which is conveyed by means of specific rhetorical devices. The study of different *readerships* – a concept defined as “a set of dispositions, interpretative competencies and (sometimes unconscious) anxieties, needs and attitudes regarding consumption” (MacRury 1997: 249) – does not involve, in this case, complex audience-measuring statistics or degrees of recall. Its purpose is to analyse the way the ad is constructed and with which textual and audiovisual elements and the characteristics of the car advertised in each case (Peugeot 306, Renault Laguna and Volkswagen Passat), to see how all this would appeal to the different audiences.

Other products that are often marketed in terms of sex and sexual-like pleasure are perfumes and chocolates. Ads for these products that present this kind of approach have also been the object of academic attention, as in the case of the analyses of television ads for *Ô de Lancôme* perfume and for Sky chocolate ice cream (González Requena and Ortiz de Zárate 1995). In the first of these analyses a concept of pictorial metaphor is applied to the technical visual possibilities allowed by television. In this ad, the woman in the ad becomes the bottle of perfume – a sort of delirious metaphor, (a term coined by the authors), which surpasses in strength and potential the equivalent verbal metaphor A WOMAN IS A BOTTLE OF PERFUME. González Requena and Ortiz de Zárate explain it in the following manner:

Therefore, here lies all the difference: the woman written with five letters is a signifier – she cannot look at me. On the contrary, the woman that appears as an image in the spot is not only an iconic sign that lies on the basis of that metaphor... but also a visual gestalt that is able to capture me with her glances at a delirious mirror – delirious because I feel looked at and recognised by a woman who is not there and does not look at me, i.e. an imaginary woman. (1995: 58, my translation)

The ability of television images to fuse with each other, making an object fade and transform itself into another, allows for the extension of the pictorial metaphor. The two elements that are approximated in textual and static pictorial metaphors have now the possibility of becoming one in front of the viewers' eyes. Thus, they merge more completely with the needs and fantasies of the viewers, those who are

always on the lookout for something they still miss (González Requena and Ortiz de Zárate 1995: 28). The object is desirable because it creates the illusion that, with it, we are finally complete and perfect (1995: 22). In this sense, there is an appeal to our narcissistic self whenever the rhetoric devices in the ad meet our type of readership.

The analysis of the ad for Sky ice cream (González Requena and Ortiz de Zárate 1995: 113–127) places interpretation clearly in the area of sexual pleasure, where the ice cream plays the role of seducer of a young woman who longs for something without knowing exactly what. Several elements confirm the sexual nature of the perspective from which the ice cream is presented. Its oblong shape, the expression of ecstasy in the young woman's face after the first bite, her reclining position inside the boat, and the undulation of the sea are some of them. The text read by the voice-off in the ad adds further confirmation:

Open your imagination to Sky. Delicious chocolate, exquisite ice cream, and chocolate bubbles in the core that melt in your mouth. Can you imagine such pleasure? Open your imagination to Sky and its chocolate bubbles and let yourself be carried away. (González Requena and Ortiz de Zárate 1995: 123, my translation)

In this offer of absolute completion of the wishes felt by the protagonist/viewer of the ad by the product (1995: 125), this ad can even be seen as a sort of masturbatory fantasy, where a real partner becomes unnecessary. In the present case, the taboo readings (sexual pleasure and masturbation) are thus primarily introduced by visual elements and then accentuated by the conjugation of text and image. The taboo reading of this product fulfils the promise of an Intense and Unifying (sensual/sensuous/sexual) pleasure.

## Conclusion

The perspectives on the use of sex as a strategy in advertising surveyed in this section tell us something about the creative possibilities this type of approach can open for ads. As we had already seen in Chapter One, sex taboos correspond to a strong natural inclination of the human spirit that have to be curbed by social pressure in order to maintain social order (Freud 1938: 832). Ads that bring us more or less veiled suggestions of that area fit the fantasy of carefully studied target audiences – even if the use those ads will be put to, or the interpretations of viewers, do not exactly correspond to what the advertisers had intended in the first place. The narcissistic quality of many contemporary ads transforms the ad in an object of beauty and contemplation *per se*, an object that completes the voids in fantasy life of viewers in pursuit of the wholeness of the self.

Other taboo strategies are used in order to achieve some very definite purposes in the economy of the ad. Even if theoretical reflections on that subject could not be found, there will be ample evidence of their presence in the ads analysed in the forthcoming chapters.

## CHAPTER 3

# Words & images

When the readers supply interpretations, they write themselves into the ad.

Greg Myers

### Introduction

The present chapter is dedicated to the analysis of magazine ads. Its aim is to clarify the way some strategies are used in order to achieve the effect intended by the advertiser, which is that of hiding a taboo inherent to the product or service or using taboo as a form of meeting the interests of the target audience. The strategies employed present a close connection with the medium in which they appear.

The emphasis on the use of image and visual codes – which allows the presence of more or less complex pictorial metaphors and the recourse to ingenious juxtapositions of image and text – is a form of taking advantage of the technical possibilities presented by magazines. Full-colour reproduction of sometimes very innovative photographic techniques and glossy paper that lends a beautiful finish to the page (Leiss et al 1990: 101) are two of its main advantages.

Full colour and high definition photos were, for many years, the most valuable assets magazines could offer to ads. They increased the sensual appeal in ads for products such as food (Brierley 1995: 113). Even though the arrival of colour television has stolen a large section of these advertisers – namely food ads, whose appeal can be made even greater with the added advantage of motion – these characteristics of magazines can still be of great utility both for taboo products and for taboo strategies.

Very often, the interpretation of a taboo ad depends on the interaction between the text and the details of a given static picture. A good example of this would be the ad for Rover 75, which will be studied more closely in this chapter. Also, the physical presence of the magazine as an object that can be held, read and reread at leisure (Myers 1986: 65) is, up to a point, extended to the ad itself, since these images can be apparently more tangible and present than the moving images we have on television. This increased tangibility can be an advantage in some ads that use taboo to shock people into having a healthier life or even for those that make use of sexual references. A perfect instance of this case would be the ad for

Sloggi men's underwear, where the shorts assume an explicit physical quality that is emphasised by the fact that the viewer has to manipulate a strip of paper inserted in them to be able to read the text.

Text is usually a matter of great importance in magazine ads, and taboo ads very often depend on it to indirectly convey their intended meanings, or to trigger the right inferences when combined with the accompanying image. In fact, slogans and endlines often need the presence of visuals in order to achieve the effects intended (Péninou 1972: 98). Combining an indirect text with an indirect image often results in the taboo effect in ads that use taboo as a strategy. In ads that wish to hide taboo, it is up to either the text or the visuals to downplay the taboo one of them puts in evidence.

### **Taboos in magazine ads and strategies used**

The ads to be studied in this chapter are divided according to two major categories: (a) taboo ads and (b) non-taboo ads. A number of different taboos are discernible in the corpus to be analysed under the above categories, namely bodily issues (nakedness, smells), dirt, and sex.

The needs of each taboo are met by different strategies. Ads in category (a) sometimes resort to the visual softening of taboo charge inherent to the product advertised, to the visual emphasis of taboo in order to achieve special effects, or even to the combination of textual and visual cues to obtain more surprising and irreverent effects. Ads appearing in (b) present strategies such as visual cues that deliberately introduce a taboo reference, textual cues that hint at the possibility of taboo readings, and strategies that make use of both channels for this purpose. In this manner, it is possible for advertisers to mention taboo matters when they are at the root of the product or, conversely, when taboo is the strategy chosen, and still keep within the limits of what is tolerable.

For methodological reasons, analyses of several ads are clustered around each of the strategies, so as to illustrate the way they are used to satisfy the needs of the different taboos at stake. Even though some interesting points that would come forward in a more detailed analysis will necessarily be left out, it is possible, in this manner, to avoid the repetitions that would inevitably occur if each individual ad was to be studied on its own.

## Taboo ads

Ads that have to deal with taboos such as bodily issues and dirtiness usually employ strategies in order to refer to the taboo issue in a less embarrassing form. In the case of two of the ads in my selection, when one of the channels refers to the taboo in a more explicit way, it is up to the other channel to mitigate the taboo charge. This is the case with an ad for cystitis medicine and an intimate cleanser. In an ad for male underwear, the ingenious combination of indirect visual and textual cues allows for an effect that is suggestive yet safe overall. In two other ads, concerned as they are with taboo issues (smoking and its after effects and male impotence), the approach selected was that of a visual emphasis of the taboo readings.

### Visual softening of the taboo: Canesten Oasis ad and Lactacyd ad

In the case of the two ads that illustrate this strategy, the visual part appears as a way of controlling the taboos evoked in the text. In order to better achieve this softening effect, both ads resort to pictorial metaphors, which allow them to illustrate their intended meanings without the need to picture the taboo.

The British ad for Canesten Oasis (Fig 1) presents an over-the-counter medicine for cystitis. Even though this affliction – an inflammation of the urinary bladder – is quite common, it can still be a matter of embarrassment, in that it is simultaneously related to two taboo areas: excretion – there is an abnormal acidity in the urine and the need to pass water very often –, and sex, since the disease can be caused by sexual intercourse. Any disease, especially when it presents these characteristics, causes disruption to established patterns. It alters the natural flow of events in human life and foregrounds areas that present high taboo potential in an unusual and disturbing manner (Douglas 1966: 36, 38).

The Portuguese ad for Lactacyd Intimate (Fig 2), a cleansing lotion that is specially intended for feminine hygiene needs, also has to deal with the taboo of referring to sexual organs and the need to clean them because of smells and secretions. Bodily boundaries are a matter of concern in that they symbolize transitional and non-defined states (Douglas, 1966: 122; [1975] 1999: 261) – a concern that mirrors social worries about the way certain things should be categorised (Douglas [1970] 1976: 74–75). The product presented in the Lactacyd ad functions as a contribution to the maintenance of a proper status quo, where the body is duly “closed”, and whatever leaks from it is effectively and discretely cleaned away, along with the virtually revealing smell and wetness. However, in the process of making these virtues known to the public, there is a danger in speaking about what the product does. In the specific cases of these ads, the taboo features of the products

are evident. There is an obvious effort in the Canesten Oasis ad to present the product as medically effective but also as something other than a medicine for an embarrassing disease, and an attempt at depicting Lactacyd as a *refreshing* cleanser instead of a specific cleansing product for female sexual organs.

In the Canesten Oasis ad, the clear imaging of the taboo is avoided in a two-fold manner. It is achieved by means of a) a pictorial metaphor and b) indirectness in the text that follows on the path of the concept already enunciated by the pictorial metaphor, i.e. "cystitis is a fire that can be put out by Canesten Oasis". It is interesting to note that the text is framed by the picture, both graphically and interpretatively. This potentially dangerous area of written words is encased inside the fire extinguisher, as if the visual metaphor could provide extra-protection from the disease taboo. In this sense, this ad works rather like several ads for sanitary protection products that will be analysed in more detail in Chapter Six.

In order to tackle this same problem, the Lactacyd ad tries to counterbalance the need to refer to the problem with an indirect approach that accentuates the visual aspect. The ad bases its structure on the strength of a pictorial metaphor that is duplicated – and thus made clearer – by means of a verbal metaphor that contributes to the vagueness of the text. The parallelism between a shiny white pearl inside its oyster and what is hidden, central and precious (Cirlot [1969] 2000: 297) corresponds to a rather well known and traditional association. After the identification of the visual metaphor PEARL IS FEMALE SEXUAL ORGANS, the associated metaphor OYSTER SHELL IS LACTACYD INTIMATE is confirmed by the small picture of the bottle of Lactacyd. It is also confirmed, in an even more explicit manner, by the first lines of the text. They present a comparison between its first and second term that stresses the characteristic that should be transferred from one term to the other: "*In the same way the oyster shell protects the Pearl from every type of aggression, Lactacyd Intimate makes you feel safe and protected throughout the day*". The bottle of Lactacyd, which is the last piece of information offered to the viewer, according to an up-down, left-right diagonal scanning of the ad (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 186–8), conflates the meanings and associations evoked by the pictorial metaphors, being at the same time hard and protective as the shell and milky white as the pearl. The particularisation of a given detail over the others is the basis of the pictorial metaphor we can find in the ad for Canesten Oasis. The whole strength of the metaphorical relationship is visually subsumed to the product's ability to stop the burning that characterises the condition, rather in the same way the whole text is contained in the bottle. The present pictorial metaphor can be verbalised as FIRE EXTINGUISHER IS CANESTEN OASIS, seeing that the first term is conceived in terms of the second (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 5; Forceville 1996: 122). It approximates two terms whose similarity is not immediately evident, which illustrates the creative potential of this device (Forceville 1996: 122).

In the present case, the metaphorical relationship works by isolating one of the constitutive elements of the second term (the ability to put out a “fire”) and projecting it onto the first term. This first term, a fire extinguisher, is thus also capable of putting out a fire. In fact, the affliction cured by Canesten is also restricted to one of its characteristics – the burning feeling. Thus, we can speak of a double set of metaphors that combine to make sense of the illustration: the metaphor CYSTITIS IS BURNING FEELING in the text explains and allows the pictorial metaphor FIRE EXTINGUISHER IS CANESTEN OASIS. Apart from this main and more obvious element of “fire”, other characteristics are also implicated and transferred, albeit in a weaker form (Forceville 1996: 125) and some characteristics are not considered at all. The following scheme lists some of the most obvious possibilities:

**Table 6.** Transference of characteristics in the metaphoric process

CANESTEN OASIS		FIRE EXTINGUISHER
Easily available	-----	Easily available
Quick and easy to use	-----	Quick and easy to use
Self-use	-----	Self-use
Safe	-----	Safe
	< -----	Has use instructions
	< -----	Used for emergencies
	< -----	Used to terminate a fire
	X -----	Can be found in public spaces
	X -----	Made of metal
	X -----	Bottle-shaped
	X -----	Sprays foam
	X -----	Red

The use of the fire extinguisher in the ad fulfils a dual role: (1) it allows for the establishment of a pictorial metaphor which effectively stresses the most positive and appealing characteristics of the product advertised, and (2) it distracts the viewer’s attention from the taboo charge of the product. In fact, as we have seen, one of the product’s most outstanding qualities is the fact that it can avoid social embarrassment caused by the disease. Therefore, the ad for the product follows the same path in its strategy, avoiding lengthy explanations about the cause of the affliction.

These two ads illustrate slightly different forms of alleviating the taboo charge with a picture. As we have seen, the Canesten ad establishes the connection between the indirectness of its pictorial metaphor and its text by singling out of a characteristic that can also be applied to the product. The approach to taboo we can find in this ad is perhaps the most indirect of all the ads selected for this study.



On the other hand, the Lactacyd ad presents a more straightforward relationship between its indirect image and its more direct text, since (a) the readers are offered a translation that explains and justifies the connection and (b) the photo of the product presents some similarities with the oyster picture. Therefore, the taboo in this ad is perhaps more immediately grasped because of these explicit knots – like the knotting together of a net – that support the indirect picture, whereas in the Canesten ad full understanding of the taboo implied is much more dependent on the reader's inferencing capacities.

### **Visual and textual cues for softening and foregrounding taboo: Sloggi and SPA ads**

The Portuguese ad for Sloggi for Men Easy Short (Fig 3) has to deal with a doubly charged product in terms of taboo associations, namely reference to the male sexual organ and reference to physiological needs (Douglas 1966: 122). To deal with the taboo, the ad adopts two different but complementary strategies to make the most of the taboo possibilities offered by the product but to keep them within the limits of what is socially acceptable. It resorts to vagueness by choice of vague words (Channell 1994: 18), which allows for a degree of implicitness that is both safe and arousing. The use of pronouns and “lazy” words such as *things* makes sure that nothing is concretely mentioned, while it leaves the viewer free to imagine ways of filling these vague slots. It also uses a pop-up visual that results in an elaborated and “clean” visual metaphor of the sexual organ in erection, and that can function as a shield against accusations of indecency, since there is nothing intrinsically outrageous about a strip of paper when considered in isolation.

The non-commercial ad for the Portuguese Society of Andrology – S.P.A (Fig 4) also has to overcome the taboo of discussing male sexual dysfunctions in public.<sup>1</sup> For this purpose, it resorts to a linguistic and visual subterfuge to be able to safely mention the problem, depict its effects and exhort the sufferer to take prompt action.

In the Sloggi ad, it is possible to postulate the existence of a pictorial metaphor, provided we accept that it presents some particularities. The relationship of similarity is not established with the representation of a concrete object (the second term of the metaphor is a strip of paper placed in an upturned position), and it resorts to verbal and iconic means to help approximate the two terms. In fact, the second term of the metaphor only presents similarities with the first because of a

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1. This ad is part of an international campaign sponsored by the European Society for Sexual Medicine and the European Sexual Dysfunctional Alliance, to which the Portuguese Society of Andrology is associated. The ad analysed here is the Portuguese version of that European campaign.

combination of items that point to it. In this case, there is no intrinsic or culturally established relation of resemblance between them, unlike what happens with the pictorial metaphor of the Lactacyd ad (Fig 2). The complex and dynamic pictorial metaphor in the ad can be made explicit as TO LIFT STRIP OF PAPER IS TO ERECT PENIS – the second term of this metaphor can be deduced from the context of the brand’s products, pragmatic knowledge of the viewer and the position occupied in the picture by the first term of the metaphor (Forceville 1995: 123–124). The following scheme summarizes some of the most evident items in the second term domain that make approximation with the first term domain possible and even likely:

**Table 7.** Items of the second domain that allow the existence of a visual metaphor

**STRIP OF PAPER**

- vertically placed in relation to the shorts’ slit
- longitudinal (7.5 cm x 2 cm)
- two arrows indicate upward and downward movement
- only partially attached to background so as to allow movement (inside /outside / inside the slit)
- words from the text inscribed on it: *things, them, take...out, put...back*

All the above characteristics allow for the possible existence of a visual metaphor, albeit a much stylised one, where, explicitly, only a demonstration gimmick appears. This ambiguity preserves the taboo charge (reference to male sexual organs) whereas, on a surface level, it can also be seen as a shield against accusations of indecency as, in fact, nothing clearly representing a male sexual organ is shown. However, the option for this kind of pop-up visual can also be read as increasing the taboo potential of the ad: the type of movement effected by the strip of paper, apart from demonstrating the purpose of the slit in the shorts, suspiciously resembles the mechanical motions of a sexual act, or even those of masturbation. In this sense, the viewer is transformed into (in)voluntary accomplice when pulling the strip up and down as requested by the red arrows.

The interactive quality of this visual device is an effective way of accentuating the complicity between both participants, while maintaining possible undertones of sexual innuendo – sex being an effective attention-grabber in advertising (Heller 2000: xv; Dooley 2000: 74). It also presents an advantage that is usually restricted to television, which is that of movement. This fact allows a pictorial metaphor that develops in a space-temporal form, which is central to the functioning of the combination between text and image in this ad. It can also be a way of including women viewers as a possible target for the ad, obviously not as consumers,

but as buyers – by means of manipulation of this gimmick, they may be seduced into imagining other activities that will become easier because of this new slit.

This ad demonstrates the possibility of a dual role performed by the two components of the magazine ad when the issue is taboo. The following table illustrates the way oscillation between taboo and non-taboo readings in one of the channels is compensated by the opposite oscillation in the other channel:

Table 8. Oscillation of taboo readings according to the channels available

VISUALS	TEXT
<i>Foregrounding of taboo:</i> frontal CS of a pair of man's shorts; sexual organs discernible under the fabric	<i>Softening of taboo:</i> vague words written on the strip of paper
<i>Softening of taboo:</i> a 'neutral' strip of paper moves up and down	<i>Foregrounding of taboo:</i> the word 'things' in the context is read as 'penis'
<i>Foregrounding of taboo:</i> the arrows 'force' the reader to participate in the manipulation of the sexual organ	<i>Softening of taboo:</i> matter-of-factness in the closing sentence of the ad (below the picture)

In the case of the Sloggi ad, both text and visuals are implicated in the softening and the foregrounding of taboo, unlike what happens in the ads for Canesten and Lactacyd, where these roles are clearly allocated to each of the channels.

In the SPA ad, the purpose of speaking about taboo without mentioning it openly is achieved by means of a deliberate choice of linguistic vagueness. That choice only differs from the way it is used in the Sloggi ad because it fulfils a dual role: the *it* in the phrase "Use it..." refers to the male sexual organ but also to the phone that men should resort to for communicating with someone that will help them overcome this sexual dysfunction. This last reading is reinforced by the positioning of the sentence in the picture, which appears in bold white lettering as if it was something being actually said over the phone. This cartoon-like quality visually depicts the communicative and interactive purpose of the ad, by breaking the static quality of the image. It shows the boost for action implied in the ad, and separates the two stages, by being placed in the middle of the page. On the left part, we see inaction: the man's legs look poised and passive, and the phone receiver is hanging down. The phrase "Use it..." directs the viewer's eye to the small text on the right side of the page, where action is prompted and encouraged – and the only action that is required is that the phone receiver is picked up and talked to. Therefore, the distance between passiveness and action is visually shortened, since both stages are represented side-by-side in the ad. This visual closeness represents the

simplicity of the whole process of getting help for a problem that is so intimate and potentially embarrassing for a man. As a form of downplaying the sexual taboo associated with this issue, the emphasis is put on the semantic field of *connection* – which is an especially apt term when we are referring to phone conversations, but also a pleasant form of naming an intimate relationship.

This linguistic strategy can only function because it works in association with the pictorial metaphor. Therefore, it depends on it in order to be correctly interpreted. The pictorial metaphor confirms the dual and ambiguous role of the linguistic message by also functioning on two levels. One of them is the approximation between the shape of the phone receiver and that of a penis. Given the position it occupies in the picture, it creates the metaphor LIMP PENIS IS PHONE RECEIVER IN HANGING-DOWN POSITION. That would be the first and immediate reading of the image in juxtaposition with the text. However, because of the text that we are prompted to read, this pictorial metaphor ends up presenting an implied reversed meaning which, though it is not visually represented, is the one the reader must attain, if the ad is to be totally understood. This final meaning can be verbalised as SEXUAL ERECTION IS PHONE RECEIVER WHEN PICKED UP.

As we can see, in this ad as in the previous example, both channels play a complementary role when it comes to the downplaying of dangerous issues, but also when it is necessary to mention the right amount of taboo for the ad to be interpreted as it should be. In both ads, the visual metaphor used to depict a penis introduces a lighter note, which alleviates the taboo charge and contributes towards conveying the message intended. This is especially important in the case of the SPA ad, where the slightly humorous touch helps to introduce a positive note and de-dramatise a problem that can be extremely serious for those affected by it.

### **Visual emphasis on taboo: Health Education Authority anti-smoking and Renova ads**

The two ads chosen to illustrate the forms in which taboo can be visually emphasised have different aims. The non-commercial British ad by the Health Education Authority (Fig 5) relies on the shock of its taboo image to frighten women into stopping smoking. The Renova ad for toilet paper (Fig 6) makes the most of the unsuspected sensual and sexual possibilities of the product advertised in order to associate with it an altogether different image than the one it usually has.

The Health Education Authority ad tries to dissuade women from smoking by using taboo references in an uncommon and shocking manner. The image unexpectedly mixes cigarette ashes with beauty utensils and make-up products, and the text presents its anti-smoking arguments under the form of a typical beauty

product ad. In this anti-smoking ad, both image and text transgress our ideas of order and patterning, thus creating a feeling of strangeness and disturbance. They present an idea of dirtiness that is especially repulsive, since it is mixed with symbols of beauty and ordering (Douglas 1966: 2, 36–37, 41). Also, cigarette ashes remind us of our own mortality, and we feel that they do not belong together with enhancers of vitality and bloom (Douglas 1966: 6, 7, 99). Categories are mixed and frontiers are not respected, overthrowing our expectations and placing this ad in a no-man's land that can be confusing and disturbing at the same time. This transgression surprises the viewer into paying attention to the message conveyed.

The same strategy of surprise is used in the Renova ad, where cleanliness becomes a synonym of seduction, which is also a form of conflating two categories that are usually separated. This Renova campaign has been very polemical, with different reactions in the different countries where it was divulged (Portugal, France and Spain). Although it was applauded and commented on by French magazine *Photo* as being daring and innovative, it was considered by others as scandalous and outrageous, which is telling of the disruptive potential of this kind of approach.

Cleanliness and hygiene are usually intimate matters and precede daring and explicit seduction games. It is disturbing and schema-disruptive to see them co-exist with such apparent naturalness as they do in this Renova ad.

The ad for the Health Education Authority has to deal with two factors. These are blasé feelings as to the health problems caused by tobacco and familiarity with beauty product ads on the part on women viewers. In this sense, the first thing that strikes a woman about this ad is the similarity of the picture it presents with other pictures we can find in conventional ads for make-up products. For instance, the whole atmosphere of this ad is remarkably similar to the almost uncanny whiteness and spotlessness of the ads portrayed in Fig 5a) and 5b):



Figure 5a. Clinique ad



Figure 5b. Clinique ad

The ads above are for Clinique products, and this brand name and the atmosphere that surrounds its ads are afterwards retrieved in the first word of the text: “Clinically”, such is the strength of the image associated with the brand (Sánchez Corral 1991: 139). This likeness is a pictorial clue to activate a previous schema of BEAUTY PRODUCT ADS, thus creating in the viewer several expectations as to how the ad will develop (Schank and Abelson 1977: 41; Semino 1997: 18). If this first clue had proved right, the viewer would very possibly be looking at an ad much like the one we can see on Fig 5c:



Figure 5c. Clinique ad

It is a false clue, however, as one quickly realises. This make-up brush with a golden handle is not being dipped in a container of loose face powder, as could reasonably be expected, but in an ashtray almost full to the brim. This total contrast between what predictably should be there and what really is constitutes a surprise to the viewer. It also prepares her to interpret other apparent similarities as poisoned gifts: definitely, this is not a make-up ad, and if it assumes that form is because it is doing so ironically – therefore, there are probably more surprises ahead, namely in the accompanying text.

This option for an ironical reading allows the establishment of a double set of pictorial metaphors in the present ad, which is perhaps the most complex of all the case examples given in this section: (1) one where the make-up brush stands for a cigarette and (2) another where the cigarette ashes represent loose facial powder. In fact, if the ashes in the ashtray are there, they must have come from a cigarette – what better to fulfil that role than the object hovering about the ashtray, with ashes on its tip?; on the other hand, if the brush is read at face value, its presence in the picture is pointless unless the content of the ashtray has something to do with make-up. It is a fact that ashes and loose powder do present some similarities, in spite of their obvious differences. As we will see, both readings are important for the overall message conveyed by the ad, and complement each other in suggesting interpretations related with taboo issues. This approximation of such disparate

areas – beauty product ads and anti-smoking campaigns – is only possible, in the present case, because of the parasitic nature of ads (Cook 1992: 29, 214). This ad is, in fact, a parasite on the characteristics of another ad. It attracts the viewer's attention by making a parody of a type of ad that is certainly familiar to every woman who reads women's magazines.

This parody is a form of disturbing the viewer's preconceived ideas and overcoming indifference bred by excessive familiarity with things. The ad lulls the viewer into a sense of false security, by insinuating that this is just another glossy ad for glossy make-up in a glossy magazine. Then, the viewer realizes that it is about something completely different – anti-smoking arguments. In this case, the parody functions as motivator for sustained interest to find the reason for this apparently strange association. Thus, this parody of our BEAUTY PRODUCT ADS schema excites curiosity and makes the viewer more receptive to the readjustment of her various ANTI-SMOKING ARGUMENTS schemata. By means of an apparently schema-preserving strategy, this ad deviates from expectations and forces the viewer to rearrange familiar things into new patterns. It brings the discussion about smoking to an unusual level, that of the ravages it causes to our skin, whereas the most common arguments tend to concentrate on the damage it causes internally. Therefore, we can say that this case is one of schema addition (Cook 1994: 196) – new data comes to join the information that has already become excessively familiar – with a suggested possibility of schema refreshment – maybe this argument will be the one that finally tips the scale towards an option for non-smoking.

The text of the ad follows the same parodic line we have found in the picture. It is short and keeps to the general tone of make-up ads. It presents a direct address to the viewer, assuming intimacy; the affectation of a scientific discourse at some points; and a very restrict lexical field related with the improvement of skin appearance and condition. However, it completely subverts this prototype by eliminating and adding a number of words and expressions that, while maintaining lexical and phonological similarity with the ones normally found in women's magazine ads, completely alter the expected meaning. In its role of parodic text, the copy in this ad keeps sufficiently close to the parodied object to be easily retrieved by someone familiar with it (Ferreira Duarte 1986: 28–30).

The following doctored version of the text indicates which slots are filled in an unexpected manner (in bold), and one possible way of filling them according to the beauty products ads schema (in italics):

Table 9. Doctored version of the ad illustrating schema alteration

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Clinically proven to give you <b>grottier</b> / <i>greater</i> looking skin.
There's certainly one product that guarantees fast, effective results when it comes to skincare. Every <b>cigarette</b> / <i>vial of this lotion</i> contains special active ingredients called " <b>toxins</b> " / " <i>cera-mides</i> " that <b>constrict blood vessels</b> / <i>improve circulation</i> , <b>starve your skin of oxygen</b> / <i>fill your skin with oxygen</i> and <b>remove the lingering traces of a healthy complexion.</b> / <i>remove the lingering traces of make-up, giving you a healthy complexion.</i> In fact, the <b>only thing</b> glowing about your face will be the <b>cigarette end.</b> / <i>there will be a glow all over your face after using it.</i>

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When we look at the above version, the pastiche is evident. The vocabulary of make-up is intricately mixed with that of the anti-smoking arguments. A good example of this overlapping can be found in the phrase “remove the lingering traces of a healthy complexion”, which could easily be segmented into two different beauty product phrases: “remove the lingering traces of make-up from your face” or “give your face a healthy complexion”. By conflating these two phrases and ingeniously omitting an element (*make-up*), this positive argument in favour of a make-up remover quickly becomes a strong argument against smoking.

What we see in the text is the same type of process that can be found in the double pictorial metaphor present in the image. The conflation of the two areas is achieved by the elimination of one element of each, which is then replaced by a stand-in pertaining to the other field. In this way, both areas are present in every interpretation.

The double set of pictorial metaphors allows us to supply the element that is always missing in each:

Table 10. A double set of pictorial metaphors working in conjunction

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(1) CIGARETTE ASHES ARE LOOSE FACIAL POWDER ('loose facial powder' is the element missing if the make-up brush is taken at face value)
(2) MAKE-UP BRUSH IS CIGARETTE ('cigarette' is the element missing if we read the content of the ashtray literally)

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In both cases, the viewer should perceive the first term – pictorially represented – in terms of the second, which is pictorially absent (Forceville 1996: 122–142).

In this ad, both metaphors play an important role in establishing taboo connotations. In the first metaphor, where the viewer is invited to identify a make-up brush with a cigarette, taboo appears in the identification of a “noble” and “clean” utensil with a dirt-provoking element, i.e. we are in the presence of dirt that is out of place. This causes a feeling of disorder, and can be confusing for our mental patterns (Douglas 1966: 2–6). However, this metaphor does not imply, in itself, a very



strong sense of taboo violation. Tolerance of disorder is very idiosyncratic (Douglas 1966: 2), and the mere identification of a make-up brush with a cigarette would very probably mean to many viewers a hint to the characterisation of a woman smoker – in fact, the intended target of this ad. It is the second metaphor that reinforces this sense of matter out of place, and conveys the idea that organizational categories are being transgressed in a way that can endanger social principles. When cigarette ashes replace loose foundation powder, the logical deduction is that they could actually be applied to the face. This idea causes repulsion because of hygienic reasons, since ashes are a dirty by-product of combustion. Also, the face is commonly understood as the mirror of the soul. Therefore, it should be “clean”, i.e. perfect, symmetrical, and whole. That is the purpose of make-up: to eliminate the arbitrariness of nature and correct imperfection, with a view to making the face conform as much as possible to established beauty patterns.

This ad conveys its message by creating repulsion. Women are the target, and they are attacked in a very sensitive point: vanity. When the ad ingeniously mixes make-up and cigarette, it is as if the frontiers between the interior and exterior of the body are destroyed, and the inside of a smoker is revealed at the outside. One of the problems anti-smoking campaigns have to face is that people are not alarmed with the internal damage smoke causes because its effects are usually not immediate. Perhaps the information that smoking also has visible effects on the skin in the very short term can be more frightening for people who spend considerable amounts of time and money taking care of it.

In the Renova ad, the strategy used is also that of mixing that which implies dirtiness and should therefore be hidden (the bathroom area and what happens inside it) with what is overtly beautiful, passionate and seductive, as it would be in a fashion show or a cosmetics ad (Freitas 2006: 328). There is no hint of guilty sex in the way these two people are behaving. Both are obviously good-looking, happy, playful and relaxed, which clearly separates the picture in this ad from a pornographic image, where the idea of “dirty sex in a bathroom” would fit the corresponding schema.

When analysing the picture in this ad, the first shock comes from the setting of the couple's activity, which would be perhaps be less disruptive if it were taking place in another compartment in the house. There is an initial feeling of double intrusion that comes from watching someone in the bathroom and, at the same time, from spying on a couple who are about to have sex. The sense of breach of decorum in the Renova ad also comes from the fact that it escapes the traditional form of dealing with toilet paper in ads, which usually involves using children or animals – and never adults – to refer to its usage in the bathroom. This traditional approach can be seen in the two television ads analysed in the following chapter, namely the Scottex and Colhogar commercials. However, what this ad is trying to do is to shock

the viewers into a sense of normalcy, which could be interpreted as “clean sex in a clean bathroom” or even “pleasant activities in a pleasant environment”.

This ad is using adults who are obviously at ease in this space and is therefore deliberately avoiding the usual approaches where the “ah-factor” helps overcome the taboo. In order to keep within the limits of what can be published <sup>2</sup>, the ad displaces the focus of attention from the actual use of the toilet paper (which could be safely shown with children but hardly with adults) to its after effects. Instead of highlighting the dirtiness and making it cute, as normally happens in these ads, this approach concentrates on the ensuing cleanliness and equates it with feelings of pleasure and well-being, which can be read in this couple’s white underwear, body attitudes and facial expressions. The emphasis here is on a shared sense of intimacy that is open, pleasurable and natural, as opposed to a sense of intrusion upon a secret that must be hidden and beautified if it is to be mentioned in public. This adult approach to the issue of personal hygiene stresses the idea of sensual pleasure associated with the use of this specific brand of toilet paper, thus elevating it to the status of a cosmetic product, a body lotion or a perfume, and not just an embarrassing cleaning product with a very specific purpose in the bathroom. This concept is illustrated by the picture in the ad, and it is summarised in the only sentence/word that constitutes the copy of the ad: “pleasure”. The neatness and simplicity of the sentence exactly matches the picture, which subordinates the activity to the setting.

In other print ads from the Renova campaign, which were displayed at the same time, a similar sentence is used: “Toilet paper & pleasure”. Such a sentence – less elliptical than the one used in the ad analysed – graphically illustrates the fusion of both dimensions involved in this concept. Both terms (*paper* and *pleasure*) are made partners in this space by the use of “&”, which linguistically confirms the association established in the picture and reconciles what is normally private with what can be out in the open in other types of ads.

Both ads in this section are based on an opposition between what is outside and what is inside. In both cases, this obliteration of frontiers is achieved by high-impact visuals that point up the taboo. They also introduce a text that confirms what the images have already said, but in a slightly more moderate form, that downplays the taboo. In the case of the anti-smoking ad, the irony of the text contributes to a softening of the initial shock. Even if it also mixes cigarette ash with blush powder, the sheer elaborateness of the text makes it look ingenious rather than shocking. It takes time to read it and to work out the underlying reference text, whereas with the image the effect achieved is immediate.

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2. The line between what is daring and what is indecent in this kind of ads is sometimes very flimsy. In Madrid, this campaign was not allowed (Godrèche 2003: 31).

In the case of the Renova ad, the shocking effect is conveyed by the picture, which deliberately subverts the tradition for toilet paper ads by altering patterns of order and also by interfering with expectations created by previous knowledge of advertising tradition. The verbal part of the ad functions as a confirmation of the way it should be interpreted, i.e. as an example of being in love with your own skin in the place where skin is supposed to be taken care of. Therefore, in this case, the words control possible excessive taboo readings the image might suggest, by circumscribing them to the area of skin care.

### **Non-taboo ads**

Ads for products that do not imply any taboo connotation sometimes use taboo as a strategy of appealing to their target audiences. These taboo readings are generally presented in a covert manner. The aim is generally that of lending the ad a hint of raciness and adding some piquancy to a product that may be rather similar to many others in the same segment. All the ads from this selection seem to expect a degree of interpretational effort on the part of the viewers that goes beyond a mere cursory reading. These ads are ingenious and suggestive, and being able to follow their complexity is undoubtedly a motive for self-congratulation on the part of the viewer. Extreme positions that involve downright outrageousness are normally avoided, since they could alienate all the viewers, including the target audience.

The association of a taboo meaning to a product that originally has none can be achieved in a magazine ad by (1) hinting at taboo readings in the visual part of the ad. As in the case of taboo products, pictorial metaphors are also used for this purpose, even if the intention is now not that of diverting attention from the taboo but focusing interpretation onto a taboo that the ad wants the viewer to associate with the product. This is what happens with two ads from my selection, one for a travel agency and another for a dog school.

Taboo readings can also be introduced by (2) text. The copy of the ad, slogans and endlines of magazine ads can be suggestive of taboo situations or feelings. Another possibility of using taboo in text in a shocking manner is to reproduce the typographical form of four-letter words (a good example of this would be the ads for French Connection UK) or even, in a more daring manner, to write dirty words in big block letters, as in the ad for Zero Films.

Another form of achieving a taboo reading is making the viewer arrive at the intended taboo inferences by the combined effect of text and visuals. In this case, neither image nor text is definitely taboo, and it is only because both are there simultaneously that taboo readings are legitimised.

### Visual cues of taboo: Total Recall and CECE Ads

The Portuguese ad for Total Recall (Fig 7) plays with sexual references as used in popular language. It does this mainly by a clever use of image; however, these taboo references are very carefully controlled and even subdued at times, and this undoing is mostly achieved by the text.

The Portuguese ad for CECE – Centre for Canine Education (Fig 8) also introduces a taboo issue on the strength of the image it uses. However, the downplaying of taboo is done by an element of the same image and by the endline. It also presents an unusual combination of the visual and textual elements, and the way they simultaneously deny and confirm taboo readings.

In its internal functioning, the CECE ad is very similar – although less complex – to the interplay of visual and textual elements we can find in the Total Recall ad, as we will see below. However, the CECE ad presents an intertextual twist that explores taboo connotations from other ads. It is possible to see in the two dogs coupling an allusion to the polemical Benetton ad that depicts a black stallion coupling with a white mare (Fig 8a):



Figure 8a. Benetton ad (horses)

In order to soften this polemical reference, the dog in the CECE ad holds a rose between his teeth, and he looks at the viewer with a ‘smile’. These pictorial elements introduce an element of humorous mock romanticism that alleviates taboo, which is then confirmed by the sequence of two clipped sentences at the bottom of the picture. The emphasis on “good manners” dissipates whichever doubts could still exist about what was being foregrounded, be that real taboo implications or just mock taboo. Even the font used for the sentences contributes to an atmosphere of gentility and refinement. It can also be noted to that these are the font and formula commonly used for wedding invitations or christenings. The one in the ad is completed, as this type of invitation usually is, with a phone number for confirmation purposes.

As we can see, the interpretation of the Total Recall ad is entirely dependent on a correct understanding of Portuguese language and certain specific Portuguese cultural values. The ad shows how this ambivalence between taboo and non-taboo can be achieved, among other devices, by pictorial metaphors, which have been analysed in more detail in the section above.

For someone familiar with the Portuguese culture, a picture like the one in the tomato ad would always present a very specific significance, i.e. these tomatoes, especially in the position they are depicted, are interpreted as an allusion to a man's testicles. Therefore, the ad has already managed to establish a connotation with taboo in the reader's mind by means of a culture-related – and inescapable – inference (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1986: 7). In this case, implicit reading possibilities are to be made by the reader – even if it is common knowledge that those readings were, at least partially, inscribed in the text and predicted by the text itself (Eco [1979] 1984; [1994] 1995).

Kerbrat-Orecchioni points to the existence of two types of implicitness: “pre-suppositions” (*presupposés*) and “innuendoes” (*sous-entendus*) (1986: 25–56). The fact that the present ad triggers its implicitness by means of an image makes its analysis more complex, as the studies in this area are normally based on implicitness conveyed by verbal utterances – even if some of these works do consider contextual and co-textual phenomena. Even if it does not present the form of an utterance, the picture in this ad fits into the classification of innuendo provided by Kerbrat-Orecchioni:

[This category] englobe toutes les informations qui sont susceptibles d'être véhiculées par un énoncé donné, mais dont l'actualisation reste tributaire de certaines particularités du contexte énonciatif. ” (1986: 39).

Information that belongs in this category must be confirmed by other elements, just like what happens with this particular picture:

‘[L]es sous-entendus ont...*besoin* pour s'actualiser véritablement de confirmations cotextuelles ou contextuelles, sans lesquelles ils n'existent qu'à l'état de virtualités latentes... (1986: 41).

The picture alone could effectively summon to mind associations with other areas, but for them to be effective, they would have to be supported and confirmed by other elements, as indeed they are in the present case.

A further subdivision can exist in the innuendo class. In that category, there can be “insinuations” and “allusions” (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1986: 43–56). Because of the way this picture works in the ad, it fits one of the possible uses of “allusion”. That is, as specified by the author:

Le terme [allusion] s'emploie semble-t-il dans des circonstances diverses, mais relativement précises:... [one of them is] un sous-entendu à contenu grivois ou

graveleux: c'est l'allusion sexuelle – de tels contenus étant, on comprend aisément pourquoi, particulièrement candidats à la formulation implicite. (1986: 46).

The kind of association the picture seeks to establish is of a sexual nature (it is fundamental as the first step of the metaphor the ad is based on) and, for various reasons, that type of reference is better left implicit. To reinforce this position, the picture was carefully endowed with dual reading possibilities.

In fact, the relative position, prominence and foregrounding of the vegetables, which can be seen as the depiction of testicles in a close-shot of a pornographic film, are dimmed by the colours used as background and by the touched-up look of the photo, that makes the vegetables resemble a stylised picture. They are “offered” to us to contemplate (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 124), and they are open to both readings, in a situation where one does not exclude the other. The picture is not *either* pornographic *or* classy, rather, it is *more or less* so: the way the objects are presented and positioned and the way colours are used affect the “modality” of their interpretation (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 160–161). Connotations of pornography and class, opposed, as they seem to be, can be read in this apparently simple picture, and they serve the ultimate purpose of the ad, as this analysis will conclude.

The dictionary entry below the picture – which functions as its caption – seems to direct interpretation towards the denotative plan, focussing on the literal definition of the word “tomato”. Unlike what would happen with any good Portuguese dictionary, no indication is given as to a possible figurative or slang use of the word. Therefore, the incompleteness must be deliberate.

There are at least two explanations for this: (1) we are being told by the caption that the image is to be understood at its face value. Conversely, (2) the caption is to be seen as a part of the game being played. In other words, this apparent bias towards denotation is nothing more than a strategic retreat from the taboo inferences that can be made – up to this point. This step backwards can again function in two ways: as a possible safeguard against accusations of indecency or as an eye-wink to the reader who is willing to go on playing the game.

The chain of reasoning so far goes as follows: the picture introduces a specific type of innuendo – a sexual allusion – whose meaning is arrived at by inference, based on cultural, linguistic and co-textual competence. Then the allusion made is disclaimed by the caption, which partially obliterates implicitness by foregrounding denotation. It then proceeds to an intermediate stage, as the last sentence in the caption introduces another turn of the screw. As soon as the word “tomato” in its plural form is used in a sentence, as it is in “The Aztecs were famous for their *tomatoes*”, its metaphoric reading is foregrounded: the expression “to have tomatoes”, in Portuguese slang, means “to have courage”<sup>3</sup>. The metaphor TOMATOES IS

3. Just as “to have balls” does in English.

COURAGE is already being hinted at, by means of intermediate stages that involve other types of figurative language as well. The following table illustrates the intermediate inferential chain inside the metaphor that will only be fully concretised when the reader gets to the second page:

Table 11. Intermediate inferential chain inside the metaphor

ARE	
1. TOMATOES [ 1. TOMATOES IS TESTICLES	→ 2. MAN IS COURAGE ] COURAGE
▼	▼
relationship: metonymy based on certain similarities and on cultural tradition	relationship: metonymy (man is described in terms of one isolated quality)

At the present point, the sentence “The Aztecs were famous for their *tomatoes*” still needs some degree of inference on the part of the reader, as it does not correspond to the usual form assumed by the metaphor: the sentence says the Aztecs *were famous for their* tomatoes, not that the Aztecs *had* tomatoes. However, it is evident that the former expression includes the latter and that the sentence can also be read as “The Aztecs *were famous for having* (good) tomatoes”, since the pronoun used in the sentence is possessive: “*their* tomatoes”. Once again, a deliberate option was made for the more inclusive form, allowing both for a denotative reading (“Aztecs had a reputation for growing good tomatoes”), and a figurative meaning involving a metaphorical use of the word “tomatoes” (“Aztecs had a reputation for being a courageous people”).

Therefore, the last sentence in the left page opens the way to possible metaphorical interpretations, but still keeping to a safe middle ground. At this stage, taboo readings are being arrived at by inferences, albeit not very complex ones, for a Portuguese reader – a clear example of an ad that gets its readers to do its dirty job on its behalf – as many texts in fact do (Eco [1979] 1984: 7). By means of a picture of two tomatoes, a caption that imitates a dictionary entry for “tomato” and an example sentence where a possible use of the word is demonstrated, the ad is “getting the readers to think something” (Grice [1989] 1991: 35). The resemblance between the two subjects of the metaphor might not be so obvious – which makes it difficult to classify “tomatoes” solely as an index or as an icon, but they do share some characteristics (Forceville 1996: 121).

So far, the inferential processes triggered by the image have brought little new data to the reader; besides, the data provided by the caption is uninformative for the interpretative purposes of the reader. This lack of “important” information in the first page corresponds to a common way of displaying textual and visual data in double-page spreads in ads and other texts that place their elements according to a horizontal axis (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 186–87). In fact, even if we put



aside for the moment the inferential processes described above, there is nothing new to the picture, and the dictionary entry merely emphasizes the apparent completeness of the situation. It is as if this left page was telling us that now we know all there is to know about tomatoes *qua* vegetables – and reinforcing the idea that that is the only way they are meant to be perceived.

The first sentence of the text is graphically represented as the stalk of the tomato. The ellipsis it presents (in Portuguese, omission of the word “tomato”) is very commonly used by people who do not want to shock their audience but, at the same time, need to employ a strong formula to describe a courageous and gutsy behaviour. The word “tomatoes” is often connoted with these values in several other expressions, and they always admit the elliptic form; for instance, the expression “to have them in their right place” is so common that it can even be applied to women. However, it must be pointed out that this apparently democratic enlargement of the application field does not necessarily correspond to a less sexist attitude. Usually, a woman is said to possess such attributes in their proper place if and only if she has behaved in an admired “masculine” way, demonstrating unusual strength, character or courage. In its origin, the metaphor is undoubtedly connected with a certain type of *machismo* culture, and it still has much to do with it, even if people do not realise it in everyday use.

The adaptation of this sort of culture-specific maxim to the text of this ad brings some advantages to it – as this very common appropriation process normally does for advertising in general. About the use of maxims in ads, it can be said that:

(...) In all of them, statements are made that do not leave room for disagreement on the part of the reader. They do not allow for prolonged reflection, either, since they are recognised as familiar: their value stems from the character of truth that they inspire rather than by the pertinence of their argument; they are more impressive for their surprise effect than by the ideas that they effectively transmit. Besides, they convey to the product – and, consequently, to its buyer – a hint of intelligence and taste. (Iasbeck 2002: 68, my translation)

All this is done in this ad in such a way that even the maxim is stripped of its offensive potential, with the withdrawal of the key-word *tomatoes*. This option for a certain vagueness can be detected in several items of the ad, namely in the embellishment of the photo and the incompleteness in the definition of the word in the dictionary entry and, especially, in the first sentence of the second page, by the use of a pronoun or its omission. It serves a very specific purpose: paradoxical as it may seem, it foregrounds taboo content while withholding it:

All examples of withholding, that is, not giving information which the speaker possesses and which would be appropriate in the situation, are violations of the Quantity maxim, and trigger implicatures. (Channell 1994: 179).



In the present case, the reasons for depriving the reader of information – and therefore flouting one of Grice's Maxims of Quantity (Grice [1989] 1991: 26) – are several. In the first place, there is reticence on the part of advertisers that prevents them from mentioning taboo subjects openly (Myers 1994: 68). This happens especially when such a reference is not demanded by the type of product or service being advertised. Besides, the readers are supposed to have the necessary linguistic and cultural competence to be able to fill any empty slot and inference the implicit meanings intended; also, the internal functioning of the ad clearly postulates the existence of a model reader (Eco [1979] 1984: 7–11 and throughout) that is willing to play along and establish a dialogue with it. There is explicitness in the right measure for the needs of the ad, and implicitness enough for it to work as intended.

The content of the text is an incitement to action and daring. It is enthusiastic in tone with lexical choices such as “surprise yourself”, “take a step forward”, “dare” and “contact”. These expressions correspond to socially acceptable ways of translating the taboo metaphor continuously referred to in the ad. They also expose the objective reasons why a courageous person should contact the agency, and the shape of the text paralinguistically encompasses and signifies the behaviour recommended, as if it were a simplified version of a concrete poem, in a fusion of the “art of the word” and the “art of the image” (Reis 1998: 65).

The internal organization of the text makes the reader accelerate the pace and invites physical action. The short, clipped sentences in the beginning are followed by two medium-sized ones, where the important facts and the USP are presented; the sequence ends with a long sentence (cut by a comma) that intensifies the idea of the agency's total availability: “You can contact us 24 hours a day, 365 days a year”.

This idea of dynamism is further stressed by the fact that every word and expression that characterises the agency is charged with vitality. When it comes to the characterisation of the agency's qualifications, the register clearly changes, and the vagueness and ambiguity become well-pondered sentences, filled with practical details and verbs in the imperative tense that incite to action.

There is a clear intertextual reference in the name chosen for this agency, which does not directly contribute to the foregrounding or downplaying of taboo, but reinforces the idea of courageous actions taken by apparently normal people. The name of the agency is also the name of the film that starred Arnold Schwarzenegger as a common man from a not so distant future who goes to a virtual tourism agency to choose a tailor-made trip. That sudden decision will mark his life and even his awareness of himself as a person, which is something that the agency implicitly promises to do for its clients. This is yet another piece of the puzzle in the game the viewer is engaged in.

These two ads illustrate two slightly different forms of pointing up taboo intentionally with the help of visual elements: in these two cases, the text functions

merely as a form of controlling the taboo charge implied and keeping it within the bounds of common decency.

### Visual and textual cues of taboo: Rover 75 ad

The Portuguese ad for Rover 75 (Fig 9) employs a strategy of association with taboo that reveals some uncommon characteristics. In fact, even though cars are products that intrinsically do not present taboo characteristics, it is a fact that they are very often advertised by means of more or less direct appeals to sex or reference to secret anti-social fantasies. In the case of this ad, the reference to the male sexual organs is first made by means of a very indirect pictorial metaphor – interestingly, obtained from a part of the product – which is then almost immediately denied by the sentence that functions as the caption of the image.

For its interpretation, the ad presupposes previous knowledge of the almost traditional association in advertising between cars and increased sexual potency (MacCannell 1987: 530). It trusts the viewer's ability to activate that particular schema without any explicit reference to it (Eco [1979] 1984: 10). As we will see, the possession of this world knowledge and the capacity for interpreting the implicit suggestions of the ad function as a way of distinguishing the potential buyers of this particular car from the rest of the other car owners.

In fact, the interpretation of this image involves, at first, some degree of guesswork: the angle from which the photo was taken makes the viewer take some time to look at the picture in more detail and try to make it fit into some pre-existing pattern (Douglas 1966: 37–38). This is, obviously, an effective way of guaranteeing that the viewer's attention is focused on the ad, and that he/she will go on examining it until it becomes clearer and things fall into pattern again (Douglas 1966: 37–41). In order to do that, the viewer will need the information conveyed in the caption of the picture.

Even though a car expert could recognise the object in the picture for what it is after a moment's reflection, for most viewers it would be necessary to look at the caption sentence to identify it as part of a car. Apart from that information, the sentence would immediately provide several vital clues for the interpretation of the ad (Barthes 1977: 38–41). This image "offers" itself to contemplation, as an information item for the viewer (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 124, 129), much in the same way as the caption sentence assumes an impersonal and informative tone. Following Kress and van Leeuwen (who adopt Halliday's (1985) classification of basic speech functions) we can consider that this sentence corresponds to a speech function that "offers information": it is a statement, hopefully it generates agreement, even though it can be contradicted (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 127).

As happens with this particular speech function, this sentence is in the indicative mood, and by a simple change from passive to active voice, the finite elements will come after the subject (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 128), as the following diagram shows:

Table 12. Passive / active transformation in a “information offer”

ORIGINAL SENTENCE: “The only part of your body that can be extended by a Rover 75 is your intelligence.” (PASSIVE)
SIMPLIFIED VERSION: A Rover 75 can extend nothing but / only your intelligence. (ACTIVE)

If we subject this revised sentence to a division into *subject*, *finite* and *residue* (Halliday’s terminology) we obtain the following:

Table 13. The sentence’s informational content as a subject, finite and residue structure

EXPLICIT CONTENT: A Rover 75	can	extend nothing but / only your intelligence.
Subject	Finite	Residue

This corresponds to the sentence’s explicit informational content. The implicit data that we can derive from it can also be classified as “offering information”, in that it fits into the same classificatory division. This implicit information is arrived at because the viewer’s linguistic competence makes it possible to understand that the lexical item “only” excludes all other possibilities but the one mentioned (“intelligence”). Then, the viewer’s PARTS OF THE HUMAN BODY schema allows for the identification of the “extensible part of the body”. Encyclopaedic knowledge enables the viewer to relate the sentence to the psychoanalytical statement that men secretly see cars as extensions of their penis. This interpretation possibility is cancelled because of the previous restriction operated by “only” (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1986: 7). From the two previous diagrams, we can conclude that this matter-of-factness and detached informational tone is present both in the explicit sense of this sentence but also in its most immediate implicit sense – as in the image, emotion is left out intentionally.

This distancing is further marked in the Portuguese original (and entirely lost in the English translation). Portuguese is one of the languages that present a T/V distinction in its forms of address. The option for the V form in the present case (the most respectful and distanced one), when it could easily have been entirely omitted, denotes a will to explicitly include the addressee in the universe of the ad, without assuming an emotional relationship with him / her, as ads often do. It also

functions as a clear indication as to the average age of the target group. Usually, car ads for young people adopt the T form (Cook 1992: 180).

It is debatable whether this ad is schema-refreshing or merely preserves existing schemata while appearing to renew them. Cook (1994) applies those categories to discourse, whereas in the present case the whole of the ad would have to be considered. The text prepares the reader for the need to see reality with new eyes. However, it is the picture that instantiates this renewed perspective. This is evident from the analysis of the picture, and it also corresponds to an implicit promise encoded in the text: the car will develop your intelligence, i.e. the use of the product will continue the process of intelligence improvement begun with the analysis of the ad, and the viewers' schemata will be thus continually refreshed.

The Rover 75 ad provides a good example of how the combination of visual and textual elements can hint at a taboo reading that would not be arrived at if each of the elements were considered in isolation. In the case of this ad, both elements achieve the intended taboo effect by being indirect: the image uses a pictorial metaphor, and the text is short but suggestive. The result of this conjugated indirectness is a clear taboo reference.

### Textual cues of taboo: FCUK and Zero Films Ads

The ads used as examples of the use of text in the foregrounding of taboo are two. They have an immediate and striking taboo effect because of the dirty words that the copy displays. In both cases, the images seem to have no other function than that of illustrating the text. They do not contribute actively to the final taboo effect.

Text in a magazine ad can achieve a striking effect when it is reduced to a minimum. That is what happens with the British French Connection UK ads (Fig 10). The text is combined with elegant visuals, where the model's face is cut off from the frame, as in an effort to avoid direct implication of the viewer in this decoding process (Victoroff 1978: 102). It bases its strategy on the strength of the acronym FCUK that corresponds to the name of the brand. It can simultaneously invoke a taboo and claim distance from it. The acronym itself, written as it is in small lettering and not in big block letters – as it usually appears in graffiti – can represent a sort of ironic shying away from the obvious reading of such a combination of characters and sounds. However, the way the brand name is combined with the other verbal elements corresponds to another turn towards taboo. The collocation of FCUK in the sentence causes it to be read as a verb.

The sentence "fcuk advertising" can be read in two different ways. One of them is deliberately naive in that it is restricted to the literal ("this is the advertising for French Connection UK"). The other interpretation is, obviously, the one intended

and accepts the typographical cue provided by the “fcuk”. This show of contempt towards advertising contained in the latter reading, which is, after all, the means they are using to make their product known to the public, is also the strategy used by other ads for clothing brands such as Moschino (Myers 1994: 140–141).

The Brazilian ad for Zero Films (Fig 11) is the only business-to-business ad in this selection. Inserting a very strong expression of bad language in a text where we would never expect to see one is also a form of shocking people into a different type of awareness about what is being said. A schema for GIVING A ‘THANK YOU’ SPEECH WHEN RECEIVING AN AWARD does not contemplate calling the people we are thanking such strongly offensive names. Somehow, the perceptual patterns are disrupted by this word or expression that does not collocate – just like dirt would in a spotless environment (Douglas 1966: 2). The expression “filho da puta” – one of the most offensive insults one can pronounce in Portuguese – achieves an extremely shocking effect when printed in such big, bold lettering. The fact that the rest of text afterwards justifies the use of such a violent expression relieves the immediate taboo charge created by the first impact: cutting down trees is illegal and is the only thing this team will never do. Since the ad mentions the IBAMA (an official institution that protects the environment in Brazil), they are probably referring to the destruction of the Amazonian forest, a serious environmental crime that borders on immorality. Therefore, calling people who commit such immoralities and endanger the future of the planet “motherfuckers” becomes a matter of minor importance. Thus, the dirt content of this taboo is handed back to others who are much more polluting – and what is left of it in the ad functions as a declared commitment to the natural order of things and proper categorisations: trees belong in Nature, and that is where they should be. Apparent disorder finally becomes an appeal to order and to the investment in an agency that, even if it has chosen an outrageous approach, still has the right values at heart.

These two examples illustrate the way taboo can be evoked through the textual elements of the ad. One of them points up possible taboo inferences because of the way it reproduces the textual formulae normally used in other ads for taboo situations. The two others achieve a striking taboo effect on the strength of using bad words. These are mitigated by other textual elements that allow them to verge on indecency without being declaredly offensive.

## Conclusion

The magazine ads studied in this chapter reveal several strategies for dealing with a taboo inherent to the product or, inversely, to imply a taboo that can present a more or less direct connection to a product that is not taboo.

It is interesting to note that the taboos used as a strategy by the ads for non-taboo products in this selection are presented in a more forceful and overt manner. This is probably because the taboos evoked have to do with sexuality and dirty language. In the cases studied in this chapter, the latter ads also present sexual connotations.

As we have seen in Chapter Two, sex constitutes simultaneously something that is hidden and shameful and something that is yearned for. It corresponds to one of the innermost desires of human kind (Freud 1938: 834), and explicit depiction or reference to it is usually repressed in the name of proper behaviour.

By using some of the strategies for undoing taboo discussed in the present chapter, advertisers can attract a segment of the public that will be seduced by this playing with fire with a taboo that arouses general interest, without having their ads socially rejected or even censured by the official institutions. Hence the association of taboo with products and services such as cars, clothes, travel agencies, or even dog training.

Ads for certain taboo products generally try to hide the taboo aspects and distract the viewers' attention to other more pleasant aspects. This is the case with medicine for sexually transmitted diseases or products for intimate body hygiene. It is also the strategy used in sanpro ads, as we will see in more detail in Chapter Six. This happens because taboos connected with disease, bodily smells and excretions cause social embarrassment. They are seen as something private, and public exposure is usually avoided. Ads for this type of products normally respect the viewers' sense of decency and adopt strategies of indirection to talk about their subjects.

In magazine advertising, taboos are generally evoked in one channel and downplayed in the other. Sometimes, it is the visual part that plays up the taboo and the text undoes it – or the opposite. Other times, both channels share the task of foregrounding a taboo or making it appear in a more indirect manner. Visually, this can be achieved by means of more or less complex pictorial metaphors that can suggest or hide. Textual strategies include indirectness in the copy of the ad – a strategy that can cut both ways, either by disguising taboo and hinting at its presence, always with the cooperation of a knowledgeable audience and with suggestive inferences that come from the combination of slogan and endlines. Finally, the juxtaposition of words and images can be a means of achieving a balance between the need to hide the taboo out of respect for social conventions and the just as important necessity to talk about specific details that make the reader identify the product and see how it works.

It can also be noted that the non-commercial ads in this selection resort to the same devices as commercial ads to make their appeals more visible to their intended audiences. This finding can help confirm the need to deal with taboos in virtually all aspects of human life, and that taboos in advertising are not restricted to harrowing

images in some charity ads or even Benetton's polemical ads. Further confirmation of this will be found in the next chapter, which is dedicated to television ads.

One of the most interesting points raised by the readings undertaken in the present chapter has to do with the possibility of extending linguistic analysis – usually applied to text – to images in magazine ads. Such an approach presents undeniable difficulties, in that the “grammar” of images is not yet as systematically organised as that used for textual material. This fact limits, up to a point, the possibility of describing the visual elements in consensual terms. However, only by considering both text and image in ads is it possible to grasp the complexity involved in magazine ads.

It is likely that, in this process, some readings will prove more individual and others more consensual. However, that is true of almost every type of written material, even of those texts that strive for a maximum level of denotation. Such readings applied to ads do not try to impose given interpretations. Rather, they signal *some* of the ways ads can be looked at and integrated in our daily lives. After all, the type of ads that constitute the theme of the present work have to function based on plural interpretation.

TRANSCRIPTION

Canesten® / Bayer / 6 Sachets / lemon flavour / Oasis/ for Cystitis / rapid relief from burning pain & cystitis

FIRE EXTINGUISHER

For relief from cystitis

Oasis is a new, effective treatment for cystitis developed by a name you can trust, Canesten. Canesten Oasis is a self treatment for cystitis that quickly reduces the acidity levels in the urine.

It provides fast and effective relief from the symptoms of burning pain, and the need to pass water more frequently.

You can buy Canesten Oasis from pharmacies or supermarkets.

Now isn't that a relief?

If your symptoms persist 48 hours after treatment is completed you should consult your doctor. Always read the label.

(Captions: Pour sachet into water /Stir well / Drink

DO NOT EXCEED THE STATED DOSE.

ADVICE LINE: ----- WWW. -----

\* Calls charged at local rate.

Canesten. For burning cystitis



Canesten. For burning cystitis

Figure 1. Canesten Oasis ad

AD DESCRIPTION

This ad for cystitis medicine occupies one page. The picture of a fire extinguisher occupies most of it. All the text is inscribed on the bottle, except for one line that appears at the bottom right corner of the page. The lettering of the text is white against the red background of the extinguisher. At the top of the bottle, under the 'Bayer' logo, there is a reproduction of a box of Canesten sachets, and alongside the text there are three illustrations exemplifying how the medicine should be used.



TRANSCRIPTION / TRANSLATION	AD DESCRIPTION
<p><b>PROTECT YOUR INTIMACY IN THE SAFEST WAY</b></p> <p>In the same way the oyster shell protects the Pearl from every type of aggression, Lactacyd Intimate makes you feel safe and protected throughout the day. Lactacyd Intimate is a gentle, refreshing and deodorant emulsion, which is ideal for the intimate hygiene of every woman. With Lactacyd Intimate, you'll feel confident and protected every day.</p> <p><b>NEW LACTACYD INTIMATE LACTACYD / THE MOST NATURAL FOR YOUR SKIN</b></p>	<p>This is a one-page ad. A picture of a half-opened oyster shell that reveals a large white pearl inside occupies two-thirds of the ad. The shell is shown lying on the sand. The text appears in the lower right corner of the page. An orange, wave-shaped strip frames the top sentence of this text. Next to it is the picture of a bottle of Lactacyd Intimate.</p>

Exclusively sold at chemists



Figure 2. Lactacyd ad

TRANSCRIPTION/ TRANSLATION

With the new Sloggi Easy it's a lot easier to take things out and put them back again.  
Sloggi for men / The first with a horizontal slit

AD DESCRIPTION

This is a one-page ad. Against a background of shaded blue colour, there is a picture of a pair of white shorts. This picture is made of flexible cardboard; it has been cut and glued to the page, where it occupies the centre. Peeping out from the horizontal opening in the front part of the shorts, there is a moveable strip of paper with a red arrow pointing upwards. When we pull it up, as indicated by this arrow, we can read a small text in black lettering, at the end of which there is another red arrow that points downwards.

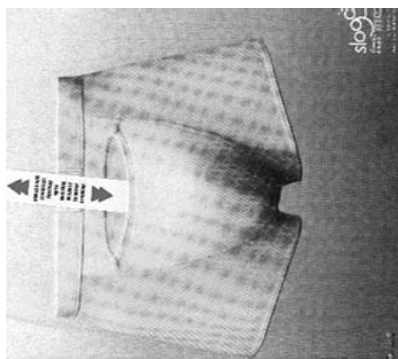
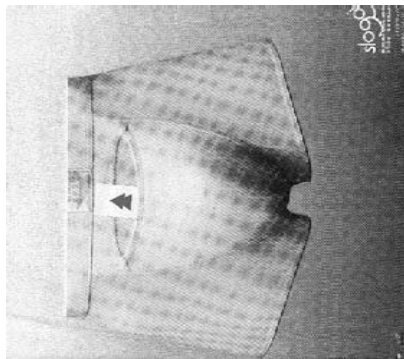


Figure 3. Sloggi For Men ad

TRANSCRIPTION/ TRANSLATION	AD DESCRIPTION
<p>USE IT...</p> <p>Sometimes it is easier to talk on the phone. Call the specialists of SOS Sexual Dysfunctions Line and talk about your concerns. Man or woman, seek help. Don't disconnect yourself.</p> <p><a href="http://www.spandrologia.pt">www.spandrologia.pt</a></p>	<p>Against a grey background, we can see a CS of a man's naked lower legs. In front of them a black phone receiver is hanging from the phone line.</p> <p>* <i>Permission granted by the European Sexual Dysfunction Alliance to reproduce this poster from their 'Pick it up' awareness campaign for 2004.</i></p>



Figure 4. SPA ad

TRANSCRIPTION

Clinically proven to give you grottier looking skin.

There's certainly one product that guarantees fast, effective results when it comes to skincare. Every cigarette contains special active ingredients called "toxins" that constrict blood vessels, starve your skin of oxygen and remove the lingering traces of a healthy complexion. In fact, the only thing glowing about your face will be the cigarette end.

Health Education Authority  
Quitline 0800 -----

AD DESCRIPTION

This is a one-page ad. The picture occupies the whole page, and the text appears on the bottom right corner, inside the frame of the picture. The image shows, at close distance, a make-up brush, a white ashtray full of ashes, a cigarette butt and a half-burnt match. The brush appears from above, at a 45° angle in relation to the ashtray, and the ashes on its tip indicate that the brush has just been dipped in it. The text presents two distinct parts: we can assume that the first sentence functions as a title, as it is written in bold. The rest of the text appears in smaller and lighter lettering. At the end of the text, again in bold lettering, we have the phone number of a help line, and, further to the right, there is the logo of the public institution that commissioned the ad.



Figure 5. Health Education Authority  
Anti-Smoking ad

TRANSCRIPTION/TRANSLATION	AD DESCRIPTION
pleasure	<p>In a very minimalist bathroom, with a toilet seat in full view, a young couple in their underwear is having fun and laughingly trying to undress each other. The word 'pleasure', in white lettering, occupies the centre of the picture, visually connecting the couple in the foreground and the white toilet seat on the right-hand side. At the bottom right, in white lettering, is the Renova website.</p>



Figure 6. Renova ad

TRANSCRIPTION/ TRANSLATION	AD DESCRIPTION:
<p>(Left page)</p> <p>Tomato, <i>n.</i> <i>Bot.</i> Solanaceous plant, from the Spanish <i>Tomate</i>, from the Aztec <i>Tomatō</i>.</p> <p>Hist. "The Aztecs were famous for their <i>tomatoes</i>"</p> <p>(Right page: tomato-shaped text)</p> <p>Those who don't have them don't go.</p> <p>For your next holidays, surprise yourself. Take a step forward: contact Total Recall and dare go on that trip you never dreamed could exist. If you prefer, we can also create one especially for you. With Total Recall you'll have easier access to information available about the different destinations we offer. You will also benefit from our experience and from the technological resources we put at our clients' disposition. You can contact us 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.</p> <p>Total Recall – Travel and Tourism</p> <p>Don't vegetate: travel instead.</p>	<p>The ad is double page: on the left side page, there is a photo of two red tomatoes, one slightly bigger than the other, against a dark-red background. The vegetables occupy the centre of the page, and the biggest is placed underneath the other. They have been photographed frontally, at close-medium distance. Underneath them, at the bottom of the page, there is an abridged dictionary entry for the word "tomato," and an example of its usage in a sentence. The white lettering used is also similar in type and size to the one normally seen in dictionaries. On the right side page, against a black background and placed slightly to the right there is a white-lettered text shaped in the form of a tomato. The top sentence that imitates the stalk of the vegetable presents a larger lettering than the rest of the text. Underneath it, at the bottom right, we have the agency's logo, the words "Total Recall – Travel and Tourism" inside a square green box and, below the box, the endline: "Don't vegetate: travel instead". Under this endline, in very small white and red lettering, there is the address, phone number, Internet site and associated companies of the agency.</p>



Figure 7. Total Recall (travel agency)

TRANSCRIPTION / TRANSLATION	AD DESCRIPTION
CECE – Centre for canine education in Es-toril. The school of good manners for your dog. Tel ---	This is a half-page ad. Against a white back-ground, there is a MCS of two dogs coupling. The male dog is holding a rose between his teeth. Beneath the picture, there is one sen-tence, which includes the address and phone number of the Centre.



Figure 8. CECE ad (centre for canine education)

# TRANSCRIPTION/ TRANSLATION

The only part of your body that can be extended by a Rover 75 is your intelligence

# AD DESCRIPTION

This is a one-page ad. The image, which occupies most of the page, shows a close-up of a car's door handle. At the bottom of the picture, a black box contains the text. The lettering is white. Below the picture, at the bottom of the page, against a white background, there is the Rover logo, the indication of the model and the brand's affiliation. The ad's general colour scheme is black, white and grey. The only spots of colour – and even so, only very subtle ones – can be found on the brand's logo at the bottom of the page (dark red and light yellow), and in the trace of red that underlines the name of the model.

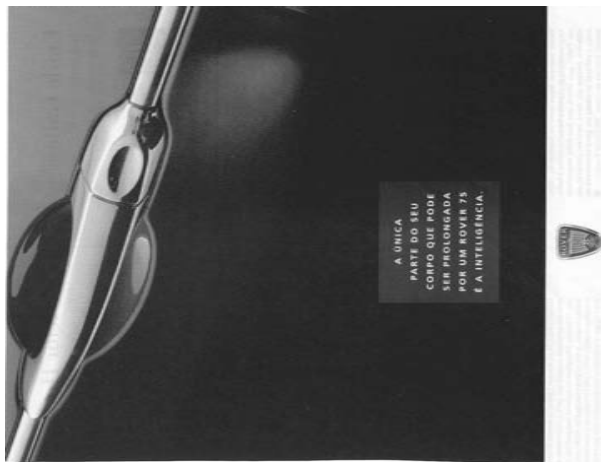


Figure 9. Rover 75 ad



TRANSCRIPTION	AD DESCRIPTION
Fcuk advertising FCUK is a trademark of French Connection UK	This is a two-page ad. The left page is white, with a two-word phrase in small black lettering more or less in the middle. At the bottom of the left page, there is a sentence in smaller lettering. On the right page, we can see a partial CS of a red-haired young woman against the same white background. Only half of her body is visible, and the framing cuts off the eyes and the upper part of her face. She is wearing a black t-shirt and black trousers or skirt, and the young woman's fingers are placed inside the waistband.



Figure 10. French Connection UK ad (clothing)

Agradecemos a Napoleão,  
Van Gogh, Einstein  
e à mãe do filho da puta  
que cortou essa árvore,  
sem os quais  
esse filme não seria possível.



Figure 11. Zero Films ad

#### TRANSCRIPTION / TRANSLATION

WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK NAPOLEON, VAN GOGH, EINSTEIN, AND THE MOTHER OF THE MOTHERFUCKER WHO CUT DOWN THIS TREE, WITHOUT WHOM THIS COMMERCIAL WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE.

'Tree', by AlmapBBDO, Gold Lion in Cannes 98. Created by Valdir and Zanatta, approved by Marcello, directed by Amon and adored by young Pan. Yet another project where Zero Films cooperated in partnership with an agency in order to achieve the best execution. If you also have a good idea on paper and want it to be good on screen, talk with us. For a good commercial we will do anything. Except cutting down trees, IBAMA [Brazilian Institute for Environmental Protection]: the one in the commercial is just a model.

Zero Films. 5 Lions in 5 years. Working just like lions to win the next.

#### AD DESCRIPTION

This ad occupies a page and a half. It is mostly constituted by text. The background is white. The headline is set in big bold lettering; it is rather long and occupies most of the space. The copy text is below the headline, in smaller lettering. On the left side of the copy is a small square black and white picture of a sawn-off tree trunk.



## CHAPTER 4

# Images, words & humour

[Humour] gives us pleasure, even if it does so in rather complicated ways. We even seem to derive pleasure figuring out how humour gives us pleasure.

Arthur A. Berger

Advertisements that work are advertisements that are liked.

Erik Du Plessis

### Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to the analysis of outdoor ads. Unlike what happens in the previous chapter (dedicated to the analysis of magazine ads) and in the following chapter (where television ads are analysed), the present chapter features ads from a single outdoor campaign. Moreover, instead of referring to a number of different strategies for disguising or, alternatively, foregrounding taboo, only one strategy – humour – as a form of implying taboo, is discussed.

This chapter centralises the discussion of humour in advertising in the elements of the outdoor campaign that will presently be analysed. Therefore, only some of the characteristics of humour as it can be used in ads will be discussed at length – namely those that are present in the ads for this campaign. Other types of messages and strategies can be found in some of the ads featured in Chapters Three, Five and Six. Some of these humorous ads from other chapters will be cursorily referred to in this chapter, for illustration purposes.

The five ads featured in this campaign for a Portuguese brand of beer, even though they are recent, could now be considered classics in their own right in Portugal. In fact, for some time, the ads for this brand, Super Bock, have been a synonym of creative and innovative advertising (Cintra Torres 2006). One of the main features of Super Bock campaigns is the extreme scarcity of means employed in their ads, both verbally and visually. The 2006 campaign analysed here maintains those characteristics, thus contributing to reinforce the existence of a “Super Bock ads tradition” that (1) helps to strengthen the brand’s image and (2) helps the understanding of each subsequent campaign, based on awareness of the previous ones.

This particular campaign was chosen for analysis for two main reasons. Firstly, because it provides an excellent example of the way verbal and visual humour can be successfully combined to lend a hint of transgression to an entirely non-taboo product. Secondly, it illustrates the immense combinatory potentialities that can be extracted from an extremely short ad copy (often with puns on the name of the product) and from no images other than a number of unexpected angles of the product itself. As we will see, the outdoor campaigns for this brand of beer are now considered as a humoristic “variation in sameness”, a sort of stylistic exercise understood as such by the public.

### Humour in advertising

It is difficult to arrive at a consensual definition of what humour is or which are the very complex mechanisms that underlie it or even how we obtain gratification from it (Berger 1993: 2; Gulas and Weinberger 2006: 22; Yeshin 2006: 301). Ever since Antiquity, there have been many attempts to arrive at such a definition of something that seems to correspond to a “universal human trait”:

Responding to humor is part of human behaviour, ability or competence, other parts of which comprise such important social and psychological manifestations of *homo sapiens* as language, morality, logic, faith, etc. Just as all of those, humor may be described as partly natural and partly acquired. (Raskin 1985: 2)

The different historical attempts to define humour do not account for all its possible types, and reveal each theorist’s partiality for one of its aspects, leaving other features unexplained. Also, many of these theories involved taxonomies whose classification criteria were not logical, since they mixed types of humour with techniques employed or even with the subject of humour itself (Raskin 1985: 29–30).

Contemporarily, three main theories on humour emerge that would seem to be comprehensive enough to describe most usages of humour. These would be (1) the cognitive theory, which is based on the idea of humour arising from incongruity that frustrates some previously created expectation (Raskin 1985: 31–32; Berger 1993: 3). This is perhaps the most consensual theory, in that it apparently covers most humorous situations, since “all humor involves some kind of a difference between what one expects and what one gets” (Berger 1993: 3).

The group of incongruity-only theories has had many proponents (...). The pleasure derived from incongruity is the divergence from expectation, and the greater the divergence the funnier the material. The pleasure is in the playful confusion and contrasts. (Gulas and Weinberger 2006: 23).

Some theorists also point out the need for, at least, partial resolution for humour to exist, since incongruity alone does not necessarily imply a humorous response. Combinations of this theory with semantic theories of humour based on the notions of “script” (such as Raskin 1985) would cover most situations of humour as used in advertising:

[Alden and Hoyer (1993)] proceed to examine aspects of Raskin’s (1985) semantic theory that jokes produce a mirthful response by including incongruities (structural contrasts) between expected and unexpected situations. Contrasts can arise from (1) actual/existing and non-actual/non-existing; (2) normal/expected and abnormal/unexpected; and (3) possible/plausible and fully/partially impossible or much less possible. (Gulas and Weinberger 2006: 24–26)

This type of humorous contrasts, which include elements of surprise in varying degrees, seem to increase the level of affect towards the ad and the brand itself, thus achieving an overall positive effect (Yeshin 2006: 301–302).

Another widely subscribed theory of humour is related with (2) superiority or disparagement – as postulated, among others, by Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan*, where the person telling the joke exerts some kind of power over the other(s), by laughing *at* other people’s shortcomings or ridicules when compared with the superior self of the joke-teller (Raskin 1985: 36). This theory is more concerned with the social role of humour itself and, although it does not explain all types of humour response, it is undeniable that it accounts for several examples of the use of humour in advertising (Gulas and Weinberger 2006: 28), where the person using the advertised product or service can laugh at the expense of others who do not possess it yet – or, in a more subtle kind of humorous approach, where a viewer can be made to feel slightly ridicule or unsophisticated for not using that product yet or for still using a different one.

Other related theories on humour posit that it functions as a form of (3) relieving pent-up tension, under the form of a catharsis. This “arousal-relief” theory is particularly centred on psychological factors:

The best known theory of this kind is apparently the one proposed by Freud, though it goes well beyond a straightforward release theory. The basic principle of all such theories is that laughter provides relief for mental, nervous and/or psychic energy and this ensures homeostasis after a struggle, tension, strain, etc. (Raskin 1985: 38)

This theory fits many humorous ads, especially on television, since it corresponds, among others, to the very commonly used “problem-solution” scripts (Gulas and Weinberger 2006: 31), where the “hero-product” is presented as the magical solution to a difficulty. A variation that borders on threat is also possible when a given problem is only avoided if and when the advertised product is used (Wells et al 1998: 405).

Very often, the tensions relieved by the effect of humour are connected with two of the most strongly regulated areas of social behaviour, i.e. sex and excretion of body waste. This effect of taboo-breaking through laughter accounts for many pleasurable and tendentious jokes. This can be explained since they allow individuals to escape – albeit vicariously and momentarily – the strong inhibitions that normally regulate sexual and eschatological issues (Raskin 1985: 29–40).

In spite of their different approaches to the subject of humour, these theories do present points of contact, and a combination of the three is possible and even complementary. As Raskin points out,

[i]n our terms, the **incongruity**-based theories make a statement about the **stimulus**; the **superiority** theories characterize the **relations** or **attitudes** between the **speaker** and the **hearer**; and the **release / relief** theories comment on the feelings and psychology of the **hearer** only. (Raskin 1985: 40)

A working definition of humour that explains the functioning of the present material will have to encompass all the above elements, since all of them are important for the analysis of the outdoor ads in this chapter. As we will see, to characterise the humour used in these ads, the consideration of issues such as the kind of stimulus at stake, the kind of relationship between the sender and receiver of the advertising message, as well as the reaction of the receiver of the message are essential. This is especially valid when the humoristic message at stake deliberately evokes taboo issues. In this case, all the above elements have to be carefully conceived and weighed, so as not to put an excessive strain on any of them, something which could result in offending the target audience for these messages.

### Specific issues in the use of humour in advertising

Apart from considering the so many different theories that debate its nature, a study of humour in advertising must also take into account a number of factors that play a crucial role on the effectiveness of the use of humour in advertising. They are: the kind of product or service that is being advertised; the variables concerning the specific audiences it is aimed at; the media where it is displayed or broadcast; the type of humorous message that is being conveyed in the ad (Belch and Belch 2004: 186) and, finally, the various contextual and situational factors that can interfere with the way a humorous advertising message is received at a given time.

Previous research in this area indicates that both advertisers and consumers believe that some products are more suitable than others to be advertised with

humour. Products in the category of consumer non-durables are thought to be the most appropriate for this kind of approach:

The categories with the largest mention from open-ended responses were all consumer non-durables including soft drinks, alcohol products, snacks and candy. [C]onsumers [were asked] directly about the appropriateness of humor with goods and services. The products that were viewed as appropriate were soft drinks, snack foods, computers, automobiles, beer, bowling alleys, restaurants, diaper services, overnight delivery services, and exterminator services. (Gulas and Weinberger 2006: 73)

A good example of this preference for humorous approaches with the kind of products mentioned above would be the TMN ad (for a mobile phone), featured in Chapter Five, a television commercial which successfully dramatises a joke based on a misunderstanding. Also, the outdoor beer ads analysed in this chapter illustrate the perceived adequateness of the product to humorous angles: after all, Super Bock beer has already established a tradition for itself with this kind of humorous campaigns.

In the same category, taboo-related and “serious” products were generally considered ill-suited for humour usage:

Inappropriate products were laxatives, *feminine care products*, condoms, cemetery monuments, higher education and financial and medical services. (Gulas and Weinberger 2006: 73, my italics)

However, this opinion might not be entirely consensual – a proof of this would be the number of taboo ads (between those in my previous ad selection and the ads that are analysed in this book) that feature feminine hygiene products and are successfully approached through humour. One of these ads, which is paradigmatic of the risk the use of humour might entail, is discussed in Chapter Six. It is one of a television campaign for a brand of sanitary pads, where a fussy and rather dowdy woman dressed in red symbolizes the monthly appearance of menstruation – a rather risky humorous approach for a product that traditionally resorts to approaches of extreme indirectness.

The same statistics indicate that most consumer durables were the least voted by advertising researchers and creative executives for a humorous approach, since they usually imply high-involvement and more thinking on the part of the buyer (Belch and Belch 2004: 186). In this case, presumably, humour would be a risk, since in most cases it might lend this kind of product a hint of frivolity. However, once again, this prejudice could be modulated if we take into consideration the kind of audience at stake. For example, a humorous approach could be the right one for a car ad if its intended audience is rather young and buying this product for the first time, as the study on consumer receptivity quoted by Gulas and



Weinberger (2006: 74), seems to indicate, with its acceptance of humour in ads for products such as automobiles and computers.

In fact, audiences play a major role when it comes to deciding the type of humour to be adopted in a given ad – or even, if humour should be present at all (Belch and Belch 2004: 186). A failed attempt at humour in an ad can easily backfire, by making the ad lose efficiency or by causing offence to certain groups that can recognise themselves as the butt of the joke at stake.

Ideally, the humorous elements in the ad should be amusing to its intended audience (while being innocuous to all others – difficult goal to achieve as it may be), and this use of humour should result in a successful affect transfer from the recipient of the message towards its agent, i.e. the advertiser. However, many factors intervene in this complex process. Humour perception and appreciation is largely determined both by (1) demographic factors, such as gender, age, educational level, and the culture and subcultures an audience belongs to (Gulas and Weinberger 2006: 43–51), and by (2) psychographic factors, among which we can find the need for cognition (an individual's level of engagement and enjoyment of cognitive experiments), self-monitoring (the extent to which contextual and situational factors influence individual behaviours), as well as the subject's political and ideological convictions (Gulas and Weinberger 2006: 51–52).

Other audience-related factors can also be decisive in the successful outcome of a humorous campaign. These would include, among others, the individual's previous awareness of the product or brand (which is a very relevant factor for the campaign analysed in this chapter); and the person's sense of humour – which presents wide variations from individual to individual and is virtually impossible to measure in an accurate manner (Gulas and Weinberger 2006: 52–54).

Another factor that influences the outcome of the use of humour in ads is related with the media chosen to broadcast them. Although there are few systematic studies comparing the effectiveness of the use of humour over the different media, it is clear that the strengths of each medium at stake in this book – which were discussed in detail in the introductory chapter – can be played up to their maximum advantage in terms of humoristic effects. Clearly, the dynamic possibilities offered by a medium such as television are well adapted to the depiction of humorous situations that present a temporal development which finishes with a punch line – as happens with the TMN and Fibre 1 commercials that will be analysed in the next chapter. However, even static media such as magazines can present a sort of development in time or, at least, an unusual but very realistic depiction of the process involved in the use of the product, with humoristic effects: that is the case of the Sloggi underwear ad, discussed in the previous chapter.

This development in time is also present in radio. Although the specific characteristics of this medium have not been discussed in this book, we can say that,

although apparently limited in terms of resources at its disposal, radio does allow a progression in time, which places the telling of jokes in a similar setting to their natural occurrence, making it a privileged space for a certain type of humorous approach. In fact, statistics indicate that agency research and creative directors believe that television and radio are the best suited media for the use of humour, whereas newspapers and direct mail are the least appropriate for that purpose (Belch and Belch 2004: 187). As to the use of humour in outdoor advertising, it is normally seen as similar to magazines when it comes to humorous potentialities (Gulas and Weinberger 2006: 63), although many examples of successful humorous ads in those two media would seem to contradict the preferences expressed in the statistics above.

The opinions on the suitability of the different broadcasting channels are certainly based on the specific characteristics of each medium, as we have seen, but also on the kind of products and services that are most often advertised through them. For instance, outdoors seem to be particularly well adapted to the humorous advertising of products such as alcohol (Gulas and Weinberger 2006: 66) – as the beer campaign analysed in this chapter demonstrates. This fact is perhaps related to the type of humorous messages often conveyed by ads for this kind of product, which make the most of the advantages conferred by the medium, i.e. a great emphasis on the visual part combined with very short but striking copy.

The kind of humorous message conveyed naturally varies according to the type of humour employed. Different humour typologies have been widely studied. Several theories concerning them stem from Freud's classification of pleasure deriving from wit, which can be either *tendentious* or *non-tendentious*:

If a message is tendentious, its execution relies on aggression and / or a sexual focus. Non-tendentious wit is more playful, relying in its execution on absurdities or nonsense. (Gulas and Weinberger 2006: 98–99)

Research specifically concerning the use of different types of humour in advertising has not been systematic and the existing studies<sup>1</sup> are mostly centred on the analysis of one (or exceptionally two) media and the types of humour that can be found there (among others, Goldstein and McGhee 1972; Madden and Weinberger 1982; McCullough and Taylor 1993). Another complicating factor has to do with the typologies of humour underlying the analyses, which vary among themselves: whereas some studies employ terms that are at least partially similar to Freud's (such as McCullough and Taylor's), others use different terminology for the various humoristic strategies found in the ads that were analysed (such as Kelly

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1. Information on the content of the few existing studies mentioned in this part of the chapter and which deal specifically with the different types of humour that can be found in ads in the diverse media comes from Gulas and Weinberger 2006: 99–102.

and Salomon 1975; Catanescu and Tom 2001). Therefore, it is difficult to reach comprehensive conclusions on which type of humour is preferred for which products and media, since terms like “aggressive”, “nonsense”, “pun”, “ludicrous”, “silliness”, “frustration”, “sarcasm” and “surprise” – to name but a few which are used in the different studies – do not cover exactly the same semantic ground and in some cases even seem to overlap.

However, even these partial studies based on different typologies provide some useful indications on the type of humour preferred for such different media as television and magazine: the only study that compares these two media on this point (Catanescu and Tom’s) attests to the prominence of complex and time-developing humorous devices such as “silliness” and “surprise” on television, whereas magazine ads clearly favour “sarcasm” and “comparison” (Gulas and Weinberger 2006: 100–101), something that could be attributed to the comparative paucity of means at the disposal of magazines.

Even if no data are available for the specific case of the types of humour used in outdoor advertising, it is a fact that it shares the same basic limitations as magazine ads. However, the Super Bock outdoor ads analysed in this chapter would seem to question the tendency mentioned above. As we will see, “surprise” is definitely one of the devices used and even a sort of temporal development is achieved within the outdoor campaign.

In this specific case, this reading of a development in time of sorts is only possible because of the context surrounding the launch of the campaign, i.e the launch happened at the beginning of a splendid summer season in a warm country with lovely beaches and was consistently broadcast throughout that season. In fact, contextual factors (which will include the timing of broadcast but also physical and media environment) do influence the reading of ads in general, and can even determine if a given ad will be perceived as funny, boring, in poor taste or downright offensive. Some of these factors will be analysed in more detail in the analysis of the Super Bock campaign, since they are of great importance to the way it was received at the time and to the way it has conditioned the reading of subsequent campaigns.

### **Humour in ads for taboo products**

Humour can be a great asset in ads when indirectness becomes necessary. The risks associated with the use of humour in advertising – which are those of a joke told too many times – are superseded by the risks inherent to ads for this type of products, which correspond to an intrinsic irritation caused by the product itself.

Humour seems to function as a very effective tool in diverting the viewers' attention from what can be unpleasant in the product or transgressive about the way it is presented. Humorous approaches, when they are successful, can be, therefore, valuable strategies for adding likeability and remembrance value to products such as these ones, providing them with a passport for general acceptance.

Although humour in ads for taboo products is not analysed in this chapter, examples of funny ads from Chapters Three, Five and Six demonstrate that humour can be a form of replacing emotions that would be mostly negative – if only the advertised product were to be considered – by positive emotions favourable to the process of memorisation. Such would be the case, for instance, of the Sloggi ad in Chapter Three, of the Fibre One commercial in Chapter Five, and also the case of the “lady in red = menstruation” commercials that are mentioned in Chapter Six.

### Humour in ads with taboo approaches

When it comes to ads that deliberately present a taboo approach to a product or service that originally has none, strategies also have to be carefully chosen, since the same kind of irritation could spring from excessive playful emphasis on the taboo issue.

As we can see, both this situation and the previous one demand careful handling. The final purpose would always be to achieve a delicate balance between the amount of information conveyed and the ability to engage and maintain the viewer's attention through the use of humour. Perfect examples of this type of humorous use of taboo can be found in the CECE ad in Chapter Three and the TMN commercial in Chapter Five, where sexual references are used to maximum advantage in association with products with no sexual overtones whatsoever.

### A humorous outdoor campaign: the Super Bock ads

The famous Brazilian copywriter, Carlos Domingos<sup>2</sup>, has a declared preference for the clean, concentrated formats demanded by outdoors as an advertising medium. In his book of advice to newcomers to the profession, he explains the effect of poorly done outdoor ads on passers-by in the following manner:

Cities are paved with confusing outdoors, cluttered with information, addresses, telephone numbers, slogans, area of business, clients' testimonials, you name it. What happens is that people get stressed out with so much information and,

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2. Carlos Domingos is the co-founder of the well-known Brazilian advertising agency *age*.

seeking relief, quickly turn away to more pleasant sights. Which means that the outdoor ad stops meaning 'sales' and becomes visual pollution. So fight back and create a clean outdoor ad. If a client makes a point of conveying so much information, wouldn't it be better to recommend an ad in a magazine? (Domingos 2003: 200, my translation)

According to the same source, this is what a good outdoor ad should be like:

[An outdoors] has to be telegraphic. Because it is out there in the street, the passers-by have to gather it in at a glance. Unlike a magazine ad, where there can be several stages of persuasion, outdoors must go straight to the point. [...] If you decide for an outdoor with an image, make sure that it is simple, straightforward and clear. Do not use images or photos that are complicated. As a last resource, focus on a detail. (idem: 199, my translation)

Other – more specific and technical – rules for the execution of effective outdoors can be thus posited:

- 1: Simplicity – nothing elaborate, ornate or complicated in the design or verbal message.
- 2: One dominant image – though in expert hands this can be a collision or fusion of two images. Indeed many famous posters communicate two thoughts by means of a verbal and/or visual pun.
- 3: Boldness – the hoarding is no place for the half-gesture or subtle tone.
- 4: Clean, legible type – the poster is not a computer screen. Light or delicate lettering, closely spaced type or type superimposed upon a complicated background does not work at 50 metres.
- 5: Few words – six or seven – for immediate impact. If there are more (...) the sentences need to be short.
- 6: Big enough type – i.e. large enough to be read from the specific distance for the particular site.
- 7: Contrasting colours – (preferably primary). Again, it is not the place for subtle nuances.
- 8: Brand (verb) – ensure not simply that the logo is big enough but the whole design belongs to the brand (noun). (Bernstein 1997: 73)

The Super Bock outdoor campaign ads seem to have been designed, step by step, with the above pieces of advice in mind: their text is indeed bold, telegraphic and big-typed; their image (though always based on a visual pun) is simple, focused on detail and easily absorbed at a glance; the colour scheme – although naturally conditioned by the intrinsic colour of the product – is contrasting but not crude; finally, the brand name is doubly foregrounded in two of these ads, with the ingenious encasement of a part of the brand name, *bock*, in the neologisms formed to accompany each image. Even in the cases where the brand name is not explicitly encapsulated in the slogan, the other contextual references, such as the brand-

specific colour scheme or the close focus on the label, are enough to make it almost impossible for any Portuguese viewer to have doubts about which brand of beer is being advertised.

Apart from closely corresponding to the commonsensical norms for outdoor ad execution, this campaign includes yet another complicating factor: humour with sexual overtones – achieved by the joint work of text and visuals – is added to this deceptively simple recipe for effectiveness in outdoor advertising.

The analyses of the five ads that constitute this campaign aim to explain how the humoristic strategy (1) helps ads convey their messages, (2) prevents them from being too offensive or obnoxious – since they have deliberately chosen a taboo approach – while (3) making the most of the medium chosen.

### **Sexy message in a bottle: the Miss Playboy (legs and buttocks) outdoor ad**

The Super Bock ad in Fig 12 sets the tone for all the ads in this campaign: details from “sweaty” curvy beer bottles, beer glasses and beer labels portrayed in such a way that they become (1) suggestive of sensual parts of female anatomy or (2) evocative of certain seductive culture-specific male behaviours – always with the help of the verbal part of the ad, which firmly steers interpretation towards a sexual reading.

This ad is based on a complex verbo-pictorial metaphor, where primary and secondary domains are encapsulated. What we have in this ad is an unusual situation of a first metaphorical domain (constituted by elements such as the beer or its containers) matched by a secondary domain formally constituted by exactly the same physical elements as the first – which, when accompanied by the verbal part of the ad, take on other suggestive readings. Therefore, the transference of characteristics from the second domain to the product is doubly charged and doubly effective. This happens because (1) positive elements already associated with this beer (like freshness, golden colour, refreshing capacities) and (2) similarities to the female body are simultaneously present in the second domain of this metaphor and are jointly transferred onto the first.

It is thus possible to verbalise two kinds of pictorial metaphors in this ad: the first would be a visual metaphor where TWO BOTTLES OF BEER ARE TWO BOTTLES OF SUPER BOCK BEER, conflated with a verbo-pictorial metaphor where the reading TWO GOLDEN, SWEATY, CURVY BEER BOTTLES THAT LOOK LIKE FEMALE LEGS ARE TWO BOTTLES OF SUPER BOCK BEER becomes possible and legitimate with the help of the verbal message superimposed on the image.

This kind of metaphorical relationship is only possible for a product that is already familiar to the public and whose long advertising tradition allows this immediate identification of the brand. As we will see, this exercise on self-sufficiency is a common characteristic of all the ads in the Super Bock campaign, and it is the basis for the humour that permeates them. What makes the ad funny is this visual and verbal circularity where beer bottles equal female legs and buttocks equal Superbock bottles, and where sound similarities allow the approximation of the well-known expression “Miss Playboy” to the one in the ad, “Miss Playbock”. This happy coincidence of sounds – apart from efficiently encasing the name of the brand in an expression that guides interpretation towards the taboo meaning intended – also opens the possibility of other related meanings. These are, of course, less evident and immediate, but also allowed by the context and timing of the launch of this campaign: a Miss Superbock contest taking place at one of the many Portuguese sunny beaches? Or even a guessing game between friends around a bar table on a beach deck – “guess what these two bottles look like?”. All these scripts (and others) can easily be activated by the action of this humorous verbo-pictorial metaphor which is so evidently related with the product advertised. According to research in this area, this is the kind of humour that works best in ads, especially when it comes to attracting the audience’s attention:

Related humor, that is, humor directly connected to the product or issue being promoted, appears to be more successful than unrelated humor at gaining attention (...). In fact, controlling for the relatedness factor makes the findings of the experimental studies in advertising unanimous in their support for a positive effect of humor on attention. This indicates that the mere insertion of canned humor into a given ad is unlikely to have the same impact on attention as the use of a more integrated humor treatment. (Gulas and Weinberger 2006: 112).

This “integrated humour treatment” – which has, in confirmation of the above statistics, guaranteed attention and impact to Superbock campaigns – is similarly visible in the other “Miss Playbock” ad of this series. However, as we will see, in spite of their apparent resemblance, this next ad does have some characteristics of its own.

### **Another sexy message in a bottle: the *Miss Playbock (breast)* outdoor ad**

The ad in Fig 13 is, if possible, even more elegant and sophisticated than the other “Miss Playbock” ad analysed above. This is partly due to the simplicity and neatness of the image chosen for the pictorial metaphor, which did not demand any elaborate arrangement or unusual angle in order to convey its intended meaning. In fact, in this case, the symbiotic relationship between the verbal and visual parts



is even tighter, in that this picture, alone, would hardly be understood as it must be, should the words be left out. Therefore, the pictorial metaphor *DETAIL OF BEER GLASS THAT LOOKS LIKE A BREAST IS GLASS OF SUPER BOCK BEER* will only function as expected with the “Miss Playboy” tag – and then, the large icy water drop on the side becomes a nipple, the golden yellowish hue of the beer inside the glass becomes summery tanned skin and the other water drops become the result of a sea bathing after basking in the sun.

The water drops that cover the surfaces in all these ads (but one) are essential as a visual marker of one of the characteristics that support the main metaphors – and are also a proof of the complexity and economy of means of these ads: the drops represent (1) external freshness – since the metaphors make us read the physical containers as human bodies, as well as the product’s own refreshable qualities. This anthropomorphic approach is a very effective form of combining and jointly conveying *inside* and *outside*, and visually identifying the body of Super Bock drinkers as the appropriate container for this brand of beer.

A significant part of the humour in this campaign clearly results as well from two types of parody approaches that can be detected here. One of them is related with the clichéd conception that men (possibly, the primary target audience for beer ads) think about sex all the time. The taboo approach chosen for this campaign playfully acknowledges and validates this idea – with a wink, of course, at the men targeted by the ad, who are expected to be able to understand the implied joke.

This approach could also be a form of pre-empting women’s objections to such a campaign, on the grounds that it objectifies women’s bodies or sees them as something transient, futile and as easy to consume as a glass of beer. This precaution has not been enough, however, to avoid objections on these grounds from a number of women viewers at the time this campaign was launched (Cintra Torres 2006b).

The sexual reading – although intended – is also mitigated by the colour scheme used in all these ads. Although they are contrasting enough – as prescribed by the outdoor rules listed above – the colours used are neither primary nor crude: in fact, they make the ads much more parodic of a *Playboy* centrefold than of a pornographic magazine. Formally, as a humorous device, parody can be classified as a form of identification (by means of mimicry) with what is characteristic about what we are laughing at (Berger, 1993: 44). By verbally mimicking the men’s magazine genre – the *Playboy* genre instead of one of its cruder counterparts – these ads manage to stay within the limits of decency and still remain suggestive enough for their purposes (Cortese 2004: 29).

This form of suggesting taboo but simultaneously making it elegant and merely implicit has also been used in the same manner in the ad that corresponds to Fig 7 in Chapter Three, where the two tomatoes symbolizing a pair of testicles are shown under a soft light, so as to avoid an excessive taboo reading.



The other type of parody that can be detected in this campaign – which is, perhaps, less immediately identifiable – has to do with an intertextual reference to an advertising myth, which is that of the existence of subliminal messages related with sex embedded in apparently innocuous images. In the case of the Superbock campaign, as in several other examples of contemporary ads, the presence of the sexual motifs is foregrounded, which means that the knowledgeable viewer is expected to spot the parodic reference. Although written on the issue of another set of ads that parody subliminal advertising, the following quotation perfectly describes the inner functioning of those analysed here:

Indeed, in all likelihood, the sexual symbolism was deliberately designed to be relatively obvious to knowledgeable viewers. [...] The message is not just about sex but also about being media-savvy and hip. In other words, these ads can best be seen as part of a growing trend toward reactive advertising, which acknowledges the viewer's sophistication and seeks to engage her or his interest through self-mocking parody (Messaris 1997: 62–63)

This reliance on the viewer's ability to grasp these references and be amused by them is also a characteristic of the other ads in the series, whose apparent simplicity is also deceiving.

### **The message of the unusual cleavage: the *Wonderbeer* outdoor ad**

The ad featured in Fig 14 presents a slight variation on the kind of approach of the two “Miss Playboy” ads above. It relies even more heavily on the viewers' familiarity with the brand and, more importantly, on their previous knowledge of the characteristics of the present campaign, i.e., verbo-pictorial metaphors and the recurrent colour scheme. In fact, this is the only one of the four ads whose image can be properly identified for what it is only after the product and brand are verbally identified. In fact, the image is nothing more than two white semi-circles placed side by side, which are then explained by the white-lettered word towering over them.

The humour in this ad – although it shares the same characteristics of the others in this campaign – corresponds to a special sort of humorous definition.

According to Arthur A. Berger,

The humorous definition is a technique which has been used to great advantage through the ages. [...] There is an element of trickery involved, for we usually expect definitions to be ‘serious’. The humorous definition is a kind of joke on the listener or reader who, for a moment, finds something light or zany where he or she expected something serious or heavy (1993: 30)

This is what happens in the verbo-visual pun of this ad. After having established a felicitous verbal proximity between *Wonderbeer* / *Wonderbra*, then, in a combination of the visual and the verbal, the ad (jokingly) tells us: “Wonderbeer: two glasses side by side with a head of beer in each seen from above.”

The idea of freshness, which in the other ads is conveyed by the icy water drops on the different surfaces, had to be transmitted here in different manners, since no surfaces are visible. The freshness in temperature is replaced by the fact that these beers have just been served, as can be seen by the full and bubbly heads in the glasses. Also, a neighbouring concept to *freshness* is used here – *uplifting* -, which allows the verbo-visual pun to be used to maximum advantage. In this ad, Super Bock beer has an uplifting effect on the spirit, rather in the manner that a Wonderbra is used to uplift the breasts. This idea could be further expanded to include the notion that this *WonderfulBeer* really helps bring out your best qualities and make them shine.

The next ad in the series also concentrates on the visual suggestion of the female body – but, instead of focussing on partial details to establish its verbo-visual metaphor, this time is the whole bottle of Super Bock that anthropomorphically symbolizes a sun-tanned woman.

### The message of the absent label: the *Topless* outdoor ad

Only a product that enjoys a special relationship with its public can function properly and obtain humorous effects out of removing the brand’s main identification item, i.e. its label. This rather risky approach is something to be attempted during the maturity stage of a brand, where many factors, apart from advertising, are already well-known by the public and taken into consideration in their evaluation of the product. Successful advertising can happen in this case when one of the most important conditions for a brand to function, i.e. the association of positive elements to that brand name is already established in the minds of the audience. In the words of two expert brand-builders, this kind of advertising presupposes a slow and well-planned growth like that of a tree – which perfectly describes the development of a brand such as Super Bock, with a lifetime of about eighty years in the Portuguese market:

The work of a brand is [...] largely subterranean, because *the stronger you wish a brand to become, the larger and deeper its roots will have to be.* [...] Creating a brand is a laborious process, where a substantial part of the resources will have to be invested in low-visibility areas and under a medium-term perspective. Maybe due to that, in an immature search for immediate results, big advertising campaigns are still made, trying to find in them a quick formula for establishing a brand or making an eventual alteration to it. *The thing is that advertising, regardless of how brilliant it may be, is not able, on its own, to create the substance that a brand*

*does not intrinsically possess. A brand is a global process of relationship establishment, built through a multiple set of manifestations, where advertising is one among others. (Coelho and Rocha 2007: 36–37, my translation and my italics)*

In Fig15, the label is absent for metaphorical purposes: strictly speaking, the label / top is absent from the body of this bottle / woman. However, extra precautions (apart from the usual colour scheme) were taken here to guide the viewer's eyes to the correct brand name. Following the diagonal reading axis, the brand name encased in its red circle is now placed at the bottom right of the picture, i.e. the label is conspicuously absent, but the answer to the question 'What is this an ad for?' is given at the end of this verbo-visual text. In a similar manner, the previous ad placed the circle with the brand name right next to *Wonderbeer*, as if anticipating the possible question "What beer?". If we look closely, in all the ads the brand name is referred to, be that by means of word amalgamation in the slogan, or with a bouncing red bullet placed at strategic places or even with a close-up of the label (as in the last ad of this series). Therefore, the brand name serves a double purpose in these ads: apart from functioning as the obvious identification factor that it always is (Lencastre, 2005: 39), in this case it is – maybe primarily – a form of adding to the verbo-visual humorous effect of the campaign. According to the same brand-builders quoted above, this would be a good example of a "relationship":

Being a brand is to have a physical existence, a name, a symbol, a logotype, a set of more or less complex identifiable signs. But being a brand is, more and more, to be also able to associate to its physicality a set of intangible values which, as with human beings, complement their existence and give a meaning to life. Brands are fulfilled by their powerful mix of tangibility and intangibility and they are, in this way, capable of overcoming the merely transactional difficult barriers presented by products or services in the past, and of *revealing themselves today as interfaces that create relationships with the consumers*. [...] The aim of a brand is, therefore, to guarantee that there is a balanced tension between the commercial objective of a product /service and the resulting benefit for the consumer. (Coelho and Rocha 2007: 45, my translation and my italics)

A strategy like humour seems to be the right one for a brand with the attributes mentioned above, since recent research indicates that humour is particularly effective in the reinforcement in the audience's mind of brand associations that are already positive (Gulas and Weinberger 2006: 106).

The ad in Fig 15 is demonstrative of the very strong brand / product connection that exists in this campaign, and has been a constant of their advertising tradition. In Coelho and Rocha's words,

If a product or service is the 'body' of the offer then, for a better understanding of this matter, it can be affirmed that a brand can be compared to its 'soul'. The soul,

like the brand, is what translates the things that cannot be explained by reason, the things that transport the essence of life and, finally, the things where the real difference can be found. (2007: 45, my translation)

The “Topless” ad illustrates this dichotomy “body” and “soul”: the *soul* of this physical product can even afford to be visually absent from the place where it normally should be – since it has been making a difference by establishing an identity of its own for so long. The visual nakedness can, in this case, be assuredly completed by the target audience with minimal effort and a maximum of amused gratification for being asked to do so.

This absence of label on the bottle functions as an added element of appeal, rather in the same way an absent bikini top inevitably will draw attention to that part of the body. The element of humorous transgression / defiance implied both in showing a product without the label or a female body without the bikini top are marked by the contours of the missing element, which illustrates the idea of going against the norm – be that the norm of advertising tradition or the norm of commonly accepted beachwear.

### The message of the half-torn label: the *Latin Lover* outdoor ad

The “Latin Lover” ad (Fig 16) is, perhaps, the least directly taboo-suggesting of the series. However, it is based on a parody of culture-specific concepts that are related with seduction and sex, which makes it particularly humorous for a Portuguese audience and also fully understandable by foreign tourists.

This ad, the most colourful and visually complex of the series, is the only one that resorts to the label on the bottle to convey some of its meanings. It is organised around enchainé metaphors which, once again, depend of the accompanying text to be correctly read. This time, (1) the mid-section of the beer bottle appears as a metaphor for a male torso, a metaphorical reading confirmed by (2) a half-torn label with its reverse white side appearing as the open collar of a male shirt; (3) the golden-brown glass of the bottle representing a man’s tanned chest skin, and (4) the usual ice-cold water drops now representing freshness but also perspiration or even body-hair – all of these metaphors combined to confirm the text, “Latin Lover”, which parodically suggests sensuality, extreme interest in woman’s physical attributes, and permanent sexual availability on the part of Latins, a reading further confirmed by two details on the label: “authentic taste” and “Portugal”. However, these ads, as we have seen, always present at least two readings and if we take the bottle at face value, the beer inside (which is a Portuguese brew) could become a “lover” of those who drink it, or even “loved” by them.

These new perspectives are illustrative of the versatility of the approach. For instance, it must be noted that these artefacts related with beer can be made to resemble either female or male bodies – an androgyny that becomes humorous in itself and demonstrates the brand's ability to adapt its "body" to all the "souls" implied in the brand.

In all these ads, the surprising effect of the images is paralleled by aphoristic sayings (often condensed to a single word), with a full stop at the end, which marks the definite, unquestionable taboo reading of what is said and shown. As in the magazine ads analysed in the previous chapter and in the forthcoming television commercials, these outdoor ads preferably convey taboos through one of the channels available to them, and downplay them in the other. In all the ads analysed in this chapter, the beer-related artefacts, apart from containing the product that is being advertised, are both means of suggesting in the right measure and means for hiding whatever could be excessive or indecent.

## Conclusion

These outdoor ads for Super Bock beer exemplify a number of possible humorous devices and the way they can be used in outdoor ads, making the most of the (apparently) limited channels available. In them, we can find verbal humour, unexpectedness, surprise effects, and simultaneous breach and confirmation of schema.

When the product is already so well-known to the public, the ad can afford to concentrate on its margins (glass, head of beer, bottle, and label details) and make them meaningful and witty. However, the campaign is also effective for another audience that might be in contact with the product and with its ads for the first time, i.e. tourists visiting Portugal for the summer season. This audience has also been predicted in the kind of verbal message inscribed in the ads, since the words or expressions are international, immediately grasped and require no translation. All these ads are complex verbo-visual puns based on metaphors, a perfect example of Freud's "economy of expenditure" (Berger 1993: 45). In fact, they can be said to constitute a fully achieved exercise on condensation at all levels.

TRANSCRIPTION / TRANSLATION	AD DESCRIPTION
Miss Playbock	Against a soft red background, a XCU of two beer bottles, taken from an angle that shows them slightly overlapping. From this angle, they resemble a picture of a woman's upper legs and buttocks. The bottles are golden brown and they are bedewed with icy cold drops of water.
Super Bock	
Taste of summer.	
Left-hand side, in small lettering: Be responsible. Drink moderately. <a href="http://www.superbock.pt">www.superbock.pt</a>	



Figure 12. Super Bock ad (Miss Playbock 1)

TRANSCRIPTION / TRANSLATION	AD DESCRIPTION
Miss Playbock	Against a soft red background, an XCU of the side of a beer glass, bedewed with ice-cold water drops. The glass is golden, the same colour as the beer inside it. One of the water drops on the side of the glass is slowly running downwards and forming a larger drop which, when we look at the whole picture, resembles a nipple on a woman's breast.
Super Bock	
Taste of summer.	
Left-hand side, in small lettering: 'Be responsible. Drink moderately.' <a href="http://www.superbock.pt">www.superbock.pt</a>	



Figure 13. Super Bock ad (Miss Playbock 2)


 The image is a vertical advertisement for Wonderbeer. It features two glasses of beer, one on the left and one on the right, positioned so that their rims and the foam on top of the beer create the shape of a human head. The background is dark. At the top, the word "Wonderbeer." is written in a large, white, sans-serif font. Below it, in a smaller font, is the text "Bebo responsivo! Beba com moderação." and the website "www.superbock.pt". At the bottom, there is a circular logo with the words "SUPER BOCK" inside.	<p>TRANSCRIPTION / TRANSLATION</p> <p>Wonderbeer.</p> <p>Super Bock</p> <p>Left-hand side, in small lettering: 'Be responsible. Drink moderately'</p> <p>Right-hand side: <a href="http://www.superbock.pt">www.superbock.pt</a></p>	<p>AD DESCRIPTION</p> <p>Against a soft red background, an XCU of a longitudinal cut of two beer glasses, placed side by side, so as to form two identical semicircles. The glasses have a head of beer up to the brim.</p>
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Figure 14. Super Bock ad (Wonderbeer)



TRANSCRIPTION / TRANSLATION	AD DESCRIPTION
Topless.	Against a soft red background, a XCU of the mid-section of a beer bottle, covered in ice-cold drops of water, except for the part that corresponds to the label, which is also lighter in color.
Taste of summer. Super Bock	
Left-hand side, in small lettering: 'Be responsible. Drink moderately.'	
Right-hand side: <a href="http://www.superbock.pt">www.superbock.pt</a>	



Figure 15. Super Bock ad ('Topless')

TRANSCRIPTION / TRANSLATION	AD DESCRIPTION
Words on the label (torn): Super Bock <i>Authentic taste</i> Latin lover. <a href="http://www.superbock.pt">www.superbock.pt</a>	A XCU of the label of a beer bottle. The label is partially torn in the longitudinal sense, and the sides of the cut are a bit rolled up, so as to form a white 'collar' for the bottle neck.
Left-hand side, in small lettering: 'Be responsible. Drink moderately.'	

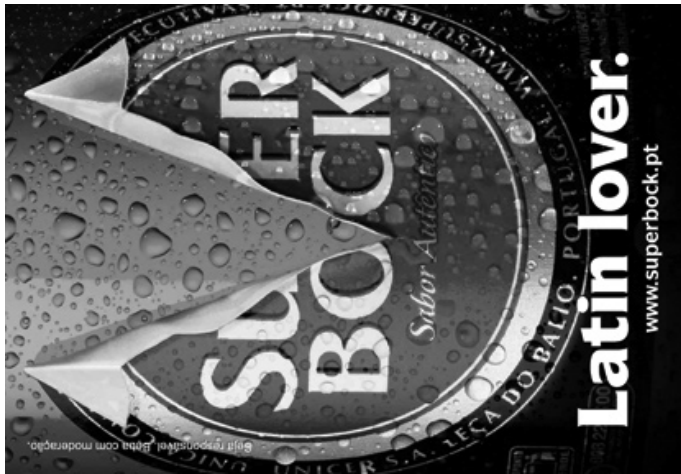


Figure 16. Super Bock ad (Latin Lover)



## CHAPTER 5

# Words, images, sound & narratives

[M]ost people are not true television addicts. Actually, most people seldom give their full attention to the set.

Wells et al.

### Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to the analysis of a number of strategies found in television ads to deal with taboo. Although some of the means used to play up or disguise taboo can also be found in magazine ads, television is able to give them a different turn and emphasis. This happens mainly because the technological characteristics of the medium can provide spatial and temporal development. Filmic images such as the ones we can find in television ads resemble reality as we see it through our own eyes (Lodge 1977: 83–84). The apparent three-dimensional world television creates is the ideal setting for multifaceted pictorial metaphors and mini-narratives that characterise many commercials. Television is an essentially dynamic and forceful medium, which presents high levels of recall due to the combination of moving images, sounds and words (Saborit 1988: 29–30). These advantages are explored to the benefit of the message conveyed in ads (Adam and Bonhomme 1997: 32) – as we will see, they also present some specific advantages when ads have to deal with dirtiness, bodily functions and smells or when evocation of eroticism is the approach chosen to present a product or service.

In fact, ads have come to assume the same bright reality that characterises the majority of television programs that compete for audiences during prime time (Miller 1990: 296; Cádima 1997: 35–36), thus blurring the frontiers of genre between what is the entertainment part and what are the buying-inducing bits (Leiss et al 1990: 115; Cook 1992: 29; Fairclough 1997). This hybridism makes it easier to turn them into objects of aesthetic pleasure and to downplay the fact that the ultimate aim of ads is to sell (Nolke 1993: 279; González Requena and Ortiz de Zárate 1995: 12). Hybridism can be transformed into an important added value for taboo ads. The deliberate resource to some kinds of taboo such as eroticism or even bawdy humour makes the ads more memorable and capable of interacting with the viewers' imagination and fantasies. In the same manner, ads for taboo products

can entirely escape the bounds apparently imposed by the taboo and become a web of intertextual references, complex pictorial metaphors or even mini-narratives.

However, this fitting in with the viewers' fantasies and creative flights has to be contained within the limits of what is generally acceptable, since television is basically a non-selective medium that is watched by a large number of all types of consumers. Therefore, it is much more difficult to target the intended consumer than in magazine advertising, where the viewers' profiles can be traced with high precision (Wells et al 1998: 344). This fact also brings consequences for the particular case of taboo ads. On the one hand, those that use taboo as a strategy cannot be as daring as their intended audiences might like them to be. On the other hand, those that deal with taboo issues have to downplay the taboo charge and divert the viewers' attention in order not to offend the general sensitivities of mixed audiences. This "gentlemen's agreement" between advertiser – a generic name for everyone involved in the making of the ad – and viewer is a way of guaranteeing that the ad will be accepted and will not cause unwanted critical reactions. In both types of ads we are dealing with in this study, there is no really offensive breach of taboo, and the ads currently broadcast on television are considered to be within the limits of what can be shown to the general public nowadays. In order to stretch those limits always a little further while still not transgressing them, television ads resort to all the different modes at their disposal: music, pictures and language (Cook 1992: 37).

As we have seen in the previous chapter, magazine ads also make the most of the two modes available to them. However, the combination of moving images, music and sound effects, spoken and written words that television can offer makes it possible to hint at taboo meanings or, conversely, hide them in a more diffuse and widespread way. In fact, the message is being conveyed simultaneously through different channels at different frequencies. Written text is often used to reiterate information conveyed by speech, which also often carries paralinguistic messages in the tone, accent and inflections of the speakers. Music can create or evoke emotional states that are hard to describe verbally but which put the viewer in the mood intended by the advertiser. Images have a life-like dynamism and are therefore closer to the viewers (Cook 1992: 53), even when the situation presented is entirely apart from everyday experiences.

Images and music are very often the paramount channels for the conveyance of meaning in contemporary television ads (Cook, 1992: 37). It is through them that the seduction of the viewer is achieved in a more effective way (González Requena and Ortiz de Zárate 1995: 11). The combination of both – something that magazine ads cannot offer – presents ample possibilities especially when the strategy adopted is the invocation of sexuality and eroticism. The present chapter tries to cope with this continuous rebounding of modes that characterises television

ads (Cook 1992: 37) by means of an analysis that studies the way taboo can be conveyed or evaded through these different layers of meaning.

### **Taboos in television ads and strategies used**

Television ads can resort to several strategies when the issue is taboo. In fact, television ads have to influence the buying decisions of a number of products that are more or less related to taboo. This fact is perhaps even more evident than what happens with magazine advertising, since television has been for a long time now a privileged means for the advertising of items of general and widespread consumption (Brierley 1995: 216–217). These include household cleaning products (that can invoke taboos of dirtiness), products for body care and sanitary protection (related with taboos of bodily smells, excretion, and menstruation), food with high fibre contents (connected with taboos of bodily noises and excretion), or condoms (that involve taboos of sexuality, illness and death). All these ads deal with products that fit into the definition of taboo issues provided in Chapter Two. They are all means of restricting some dangers when they constitute a threat to the “proper” organisation of society and a menace to the wholeness of the individual.

The television ads that will be studied in this chapter are divided into the same two major groups that were used to categorise magazine ads: commercials for taboo products and commercials for non-taboo products. In television ads, as in the case of the magazine ads studied in the previous chapter, ads for taboo products and ads that try to make taboo out of non-taboo products, the tools used are technically the same. Text, image, music, and sound effects are used to play up taboo or to hide it. However, they are used in entirely different manners in each of the categories. That is the reason why “taboo products” and “non-taboo products” constitute the main divisions in both chapters dedicated to the analysis of ads.

### **Taboo ads**

When the product or service advertised implies taboo connotations, television ads have the possibility of downplaying taboo through a larger number of channels than magazine ads. Therefore, the number of combinatory possibilities used for the softening of taboo is necessarily larger. The analyses below provide some examples that illustrate these forms of dealing with taboo: visual softening of taboo, textual softening of taboo, and visual and textual downplaying of taboo. Other ads choose to play up taboo possibilities that are already present.

### Visual softening of taboo

In the ads that exemplify the use of this strategy, two main categories are represented: (1) developing pictorial metaphors and (2) use of children and animals to downplay the taboos involved in the products advertised.

#### Developing pictorial metaphors: Skip ad

Forceville's theories on pictorial metaphor (1995), on which the analyses of several magazine ads in the previous chapter were based, were applied to static images. The author opens the possibility that pictorial metaphors can also exist in channels that possess moving images, such as television (Forceville 1995: 224). However, when we apply this type of analysis to television ads some changes have to be considered. Moving images present a development in time, which is partially real and partially inferred, and a development in space – which is virtual. Therefore, television ads can resort to more complex pictorial metaphors, where both terms can appear one after the other, in a dynamic that is necessarily absent from the static images of magazine ads (Forceville 1995: 225). Also, the combination of sounds, music and moving images on television allows for the possibility of spreading the meanings encased in the terms of the metaphor through different codes. It is a fact that many television ads resort to some kind of pictorial metaphor in order to enhance the meanings they want to convey. Also, as we have seen in the previous chapter, magazine ads that have to or want to deal with taboo often use this strategy because it allows a safe degree of indirectness and the replacement of something dangerous for something that is both eye-pleasing and less polemical than the taboo would be.

The commercial for a WC cleaning and disinfectant product broadcast in Portugal about two years ago presents a rather straightforward example of a developing pictorial metaphor. The advertising of this type of product presents obvious difficulties. The almost unavoidable need to show and speak about unpleasant smells and dirtiness related with excretion makes the advertisers resort to a number of strategies that allow the public mentioning of such private and taboo matters. This commercial attacks the issue of bad smell with a special strategy of indirectness. Firstly, there is exaggeration that foregrounds the magnitude of the problem. Secondly, it uses a pun on the two possible meanings of “gas”, from which derives a pictorial metaphor, whose two terms were visually present. There were obvious similarities between the two, which made it easier to identify one in terms of another.

In the Skip detergent commercial (Fig 17), something unpleasant, annoying and undesirable is converted into something creative and special. This is done through

the use of a complex verbo-pictorial metaphor that presents a visual development in the two parts of the ad. The first section of the ad begins with a rapid succession of colours, canvas painting and stains on white clothes, as a sort of introduction to the theme that is about to be developed. The central concept of the ad is Skip's ability to convert something that happens everyday, which is boring and repetitive, i.e. dirtying clothes and having to remove stains from it, into a unique moment.

That process of narrowing down what is general to a single meaningful moment is achieved through a slight deviation from the usual focus of the taboo issue – dealing with the dirtiness itself – and keeping the viewers' attention on the interesting things that can be done and that can stain our clothes. The ad is accentuating the fact that stains are a by-product of creativity, and that stains are a reflex of our own individuality. As Myers points out, "soap isn't just a thing for cleaning clothes; it can be freshness, modernity, leisure, tradition, ecology." (1994: 19). Even though he was speaking about the early stages of advertising, at a time when products were starting to be associated with values, the present Skip ad demonstrates that the modern detergent ads are still marketed in terms of meanings for the people who use them. In the present case, Skip IS creativity.

This idea is further reinforced by the pictorial metaphor that is present from the beginning of the ad, which can be verbalised as WHITE CANVAS IS WHITE T-SHIRT (and vice-versa), since both are being used as physical supports for different colours of paint. The fact that these two surfaces are made similar in this context allows for the existence of the next metaphor, which could function as an able summary of the ad's concept: GETTING DIRTY IS BEING CREATIVE. This approximation also establishes an approach between the space of art and creation and the space occupied by our body, which can itself be considered a sort of canvas for colour and art. This idea is related with the notion of the "growing-up process" expressed by the use of a child in this ad (apart from the endearing effect the use of children normally implies). The ad reinforces the notion that movement – be that physical or mental – cannot happen in confined spaces. Skip corresponds to a lack of boundaries that allows motion and experiencing to take place. The idea of trial and error (which is visually translated by the fact that the paint is on a lot of places other than on the canvas) is therefore crucial in the universe of this ad, where the stain/error is turned into a part of the whole process, instead of being just something wholly negative.

The metaphor STAINS = CREATIVITY that rules the ad is confirmed at crucial points, namely the middle and the end, after having been introduced by a succession of images where painting and clothes dirtying are quickly juxtaposed, which visually translates the creative process in its entirety. The critical turning point occurs when we see the reaction of the young painter's mother. The image freezes when we see the look on her face, and it is as if the female voice-over we



hear is her own inner voice telling us (and herself) how stains should really be interpreted – and how she lives with them, with Skip's help. The male voice-over, at the end of the ad, summarizes the complex metaphors that constitute the ad in a short sentence that emphasizes the idea of "life as a learning process", where people must be allowed space to learn.

### **Softening of taboo through the use of animals and children: Scottex and Colhagar ads**

Both ads in this section are for toilet paper – and both use the Ah- factor (Brierley 1995: 159, 219) in order to distract the viewers' attention from the obvious taboo potential of their product. Animals and children are effective attention-grabbers in advertising, mainly because they are small, cute and supposedly innocent in their motives. It has also been proved that the protective reaction towards this kind of stimuli is a normal one, and the advertisers' awareness of that fact often results in their frequent use:

Humans respond with emotions and behaviour patterns of parental care to a number of configurational key stimuli that can easily be analysed – and also exaggerated. One of them is a high and slightly bulging forehead, a brain case large in proportion to the face and the visceral cranium, large eyes, rounded cheeks, short and stubby limbs, and a rounded fat body. Additional key stimuli are uncertain, stumbling movements. A puppy which can keep its intended direction as long as it walks, but deviates from it the moment it tries to gallop, is surprisingly sweet. (Lorenz 1981: 164)

This is very much the case with these two ads, which demonstrate a particularly careful choice of the children and animals employed. Their use allows the display of highly appealing and endearing scenes that evoke pleasurable and happy feelings in the target audience intended (Delbecque 1990: 200–201). Both ads present a very simple narrative form in order to justify the use of animals and children where nothing in the product seems to demand their presence.

The Scottex ad (Fig 18) presents an imaginary world where a large number of Labrador puppies are charged with a Mission Impossible-like task, which is that of ensuring everyone's comfort and happiness with the help of Scottex toilet paper. This fact clearly places the ad in a fantasy dimension that allows the attribution of human qualities to animals. It conveys, at the same time, a cartoon-like atmosphere to this ad that clearly nullifies what is taboo about the situations where toilet paper is normally used. This distracting effect culminates in the scene where one of the puppies barks to call the young woman's attention. In this scene, the toilet paper is

seen being used. However, the role it fulfils is not the usual one that toilet paper plays in the bathroom. This is an ingenious form of escaping the need to show the paper in action where it is most needed, and a possibility of demonstrating the paper's capacity of absorption. In this use of green liquid as a substitute for liquid matters that issue from the body, this ad is employing the same taboo-avoiding strategy as several sanpro ads that will be studied more closely in the next chapter.

In the Scottex ad, it is definitely the visual part that minimises taboo, and it is up to the text to clarify the most obvious uses of this toilet paper. The expressions "*comfortable thickness*" (and, to a lesser degree, "*maximum absorption*") laconically indicate that this paper is primarily meant to be in contact with the body and matters that emanate from it.

With the Colhogar toilet paper ad (Fig 29), the strategy employed is slightly different. The taboo is visually mitigated, because children are being used, and the normal usage of the paper is depicted – once again because the actors are children. This allows the ad to show the paper being used for body cleaning processes, something that could not be attempted if the actors were adults. The children sitting on their potties and commenting on the qualities of this paper in a mock business-like manner imitate adult behaviour. It is this fact that makes the ad appealing and endearing, while it makes the viewer forget that they are mimicking another adult behaviour, which is that of using toilet paper for cleaning the body and choosing the paper they should buy according to the degree of comfort and absorption offered by each brand. The full appreciation of the qualities offered by this specific brand is also magnified by the delighted facial expressions of the toddlers when they feel the texture of the paper – once again, something that would be difficult to convey exactly in the same way if adult actors were employed. The lip-sync trick that makes the voice-over's words sound as if they were uttered by the children contributes to the light entertainment-film effect this ad imitates. This trick is used in films such as *Look Who's Talking* and it allows adults' speech to be shown as if it came from a child's mouth, in order to obtain a humorous effect. In the case of this ad, it is used as an auxiliary tool in the minimising of taboo. If children are saying it, it stops being a taboo and becomes merely funny.

### Textual softening of taboo

Some television ads avoid presenting a clearly delineated narrative configuration and constitute themselves as pure objects of aesthetic contemplation (Rodrigues 1987: 96; González Requena and Ortiz de Zárate 1995: 21), like the Sanex ad that will be analysed in one of the subsections below. However, many ads in this selection offer their message under the outline of a story with more or less elaborated

plots. This strategy has been used very often (Brierley 1995: 164–166) and can be found, albeit in a more stylised and inferential form, in magazine advertising. However, the moving images of television make narratives more credible and less demanding in terms of the amount of imagination the viewer has to invest in the making up of the situation depicted. For less effort than what would be needed in a magazine ad, the viewer can feel a part of a plot that evolves in real time or that simulates it through ellipsis and cohesive devices that are easily understandable by every viewer (Toolan 1988: 81; Cook 1992: 152–155, 169–172).

In fact, the use of narrative in television ads can be an attractive and appealing form of referring to culturally determined worldviews that are commonly accepted by the public as being the prevalent or correct ones (Brunt 1990: 60). The attractive wrapping of the narrative plot usually guarantees a sustained degree of interest on the part of the viewers, and contributes to the homogenous inner structure these ads usually present – a simplification that may obliterate more polemical social issues. The following quotation effectively summarises this functioning; even if its main aim is to describe narrative forms and genres on television, it is nonetheless applicable to a *genre* such as advertising, which manages to renew itself continuously by feeding on every other type of narrative (Cook 1992: 34; Couto 1999: 56). O'Shaughnessy explains it thus:

The narrative forms of television and its use of genre can also mask social contradictions. Three aspects of narrative – the form itself, its stress on individuals, and the way it resolves problems – all contribute to this. *First, we take pleasure in narrative from the form itself*; the setting up of a mystery or problem which we know will be dramatically resolved. We can get more caught up in the process of narrative development than in what the story is actually about. *Secondly, most narratives are about individuals we can identify or empathize with*. The focus on individuals means we may lose sight of people as representations of social groups and therefore pay less attention to society and its institutions. *Thirdly,... there are 'magical' endings to some stories, whereby complex problems are suddenly solved by a twist of fate or coincidence which will provide a happy ending*. TV uses similar 'magical' endings as a way of dealing with the complex social problems it may have set up. (1990: 97, my italics).

In television commercials – and in magazine advertisements – the product advertised seems to represent the magical object that allows for the solving of a number of problems that face us throughout life. These objects are used by the characters in order to achieve the happy ending. This prototypical narrative (Propp [1969] 1970: 55–57) is present in several condensed stories that ads tell to their publics:

In all advertisements in which (...) there is a narrative-style emphasis on change of state with a before (How *can* I get rid of this dandruff?)/ 'Why *do* we need so many fillings at the dentist's?') and an after ('I've said goodbye to dandruff thanks

to Glam’/ ‘Now we’ve switched to Chopperbopper the dentist has nothing to do!’), the product fulfils the role of important aid or accessory in reaching or maintaining a general quality of life, the desirability of which is relatively uncontroversial. Conversely, note how such a narrative format tends to fall away when it comes to the promotion of truly luxury items such as perfumes, fur coats, very expensive cars, and so on. In these, a more *synecdochic* (...) relation seems to obtain, where the product is presented as an intrinsic part (however small) of the chic and elegant lifestyle that the advertisement typically portrays. Instead of representing the sender, the product is part of the object. As a consequence, the roles of sender, helper and opponent (at least), and any marked sense of a before and an after, are usually absent. Such luxury advertisements are very much more *description* than narrative. (Toolan 1988: 94–95)

Some ads for everyday products, like the Sanex ad and some sanpro commercials that will be analysed in the next chapter, also resort to non-narrative structures, perhaps to achieve an upscale effect. In this sense, a deodorant is advertised in the same way a perfume would be. The object advertised is no longer a weapon used to achieve something else – i.e. the final apotheosis of a desire being fulfilled (González Requena and Ortiz de Zárate 1995: 42), but rather an end in itself. The Object Advertised is the Object of Desire (González Requena and Ortiz de Zárate 1995: 44). In the latter, there is no action being developed, no temporality inherent to changes. Even more importantly, there is no interplay and friction between participants in the situation depicted. The actor in the image fuses with the viewer and a narcissistic relationship is established (González Requena and Ortiz de Zárate 1995: 45). Narratives demand some inferential work on the part of the viewer, which may contribute to the further identification with what is being shown:

From the viewer’s perspective, conclusions drawn from dramas are “mine”, whereas conclusions urged in lectures are “ideas that other people are trying to impose on me.” (Wells et al 1998: 404).

### Softening of taboo through intertextual narrative: Harpic ad

The Harpic ad (Fig 20) relies heavily on a parody of another genre to minimise the taboo inherent to its product. Although the impact of this ad is mainly visual, its narrative format justifies its classification under the number of textual devices available for downplaying taboo.

This ad sidesteps taboo by means of an ingenious approximation with an adventure series, borrowing from it all the characteristics that make this genre an active and interesting one for the majority of the viewers. There are the quick changes of scene, the exciting musical theme, the daring stunt action, the masks

and protection suits, the technological gadgets and the concept of a mission to be fulfilled at all costs that underlies the frantic activity of the actors involved. The approximation between this ad for a WC cleaner and a *Mission Impossible* episode is justified by the sheer difficulty that the task normally involves. WCs are hard to clean and disinfect properly, and that is why this process might appear as “impossible” a mission to accomplish such as the ones presented in the series. What this ad tries to do is to lend an adventurous and exciting edge to a task that is usually seen as one of the most unpleasant of the home chores, and one that is usually done by women, no matter how athletic and brave they are. This visual diversion takes the viewer’s mind from what can be displeasing about it. Even if visually stripped of its most obvious problems – dirtiness and bad smell – the dirty toilet is displayed as the evil that must be conquered and neutralised. The germs inside it, which symbolize the taboo, must be “exterminated” with the use of Harpic. This cleaning up of unpleasantness by the product finds its counterpart in the strategy of deviation used by the ad. Harpic cleans the WC as effectively as this ad cleans the need to refer to such manners openly. What this ad is effectively saying is that even at home, life can be an adventure, even if it only means dealing with the taboo area of dirty toilets. It is interesting to note, in the final scene, that one of the actors involved in the adventure is, after all, a woman, and women are the ones who usually do the household chores. Therefore, the final message of the narrative in this ad could be that women are as capable of driving fast cars, jumping off moving trains and dealing with state-of-the-art technology as of choosing the right WC cleanser to keep their houses clean.

### **Textual and visual softening of taboo: Fibre 1 ad**

The Fibre 1 ad (Fig 21) is an uncommon case where the social mechanisms used for dealing with taboo are openly displayed, something which is only paralleled, in the present selection of ads, by some of the sanitary protection ads studied in Chapter Six.

In this ad, both the visual and the textual parts play major roles in the down-playing of taboo, and therefore it is important to describe the setting of the scene, which is a dining room, decorated in a sober and traditional style. The table is set for breakfast: the tablecloth, the crystal jars and glasses and the china cups emphasize the quiet luxury of the room. There are two women sitting at the table, one of them in her mid-forties and the other about thirty. Both are impeccably dressed and made-up at breakfast time, which provides the viewer with further information about the social class they belong to – very possibly to that of the rich and inactive. This deduction is immediately confirmed by their exaggerated upper

class accent, which can be identified by any Portuguese viewer by means of markers such as the perfect articulation of words and a peculiar voice intonation.

This setting clearly differentiates this product from others in the same range. Breakfast cereals are commonly advertised as a quick means of getting a healthy meal at the beginning of the day, as in the morning there is usually little time to sit down and enjoy food calmly. Children and adolescents are very often the target for this type of product – which is commonly reinforced by the use of a lively and rhythmic soundtrack, and plenty of animation in the kitchen or dining room, foregrounding the energy-giving potential of the cereal.

This particular ad emphasizes tradition, good-manners and politeness. It evokes an old-world ambiance of a leisurely time in which meals can be enjoyed in silence, at a perfectly laid out breakfast table. This kind of setting and the characters portrayed appeal to an older audience, one that appreciates traditional values and identifies with them – either because they really belong to that same social class or because they wish they could belong. In fact, the angles used place the viewer in the position of another guest sitting at the breakfast table and sharing the meal with the two women (at least during the dialogue), which clearly invites such an identification.

In this ad, silence becomes conspicuous, in a medium that usually makes the most of the sound resources at its disposal (Cook 1992: 44–45; Blake 1997: 228). This strategy is, first of all, a very effective means of creating a differentiated space inside the commercial break. Among so many ads that take advantage of their audio capacity to the full, the silence in this ad attracts attention and helps the viewer focus on what is essential for the message of the ad. These are the words spoken – and those left unspoken –, facial expressions and body gestures, whose implicit content the ad stresses, as we will see, at important moments.

Besides establishing a space for itself among the other commercials in the break by means of a clever use of silence, this ad was also strategically placed, when it first appeared, as the sponsor of the rerun of the very successful Brazilian soap opera *História de Amor* (*Love Story*). Its main theme was the importance of traditional family values and the middle-class protagonist's relationship with an upper class nutritionist doctor. In fact, many of the settings in the soap opera resembled the ambiance depicted in this ad. Thus, the ad managed to establish a continuity link with this program (the ads were shown at least once at the beginning, during the commercial breaks, and at the end), which was further reinforced by the sponsoring, which often indicates some thematic identity between sponsor and sponsored. This approximation guaranteed a friendly environment for this ad, based on the assumption that viewers who enjoyed that program were also likely to adhere to the product advertised and to the strategy adopted (Myers 1999: 128–129; Brierley 1995: 136).

The Fibre 1 ad presents an interesting case of proximity and distancing in relation to taboo. In fact, the name of the product immediately provides a possible association with a taboo issue. Eating plenty of fibre can be seen as a cure for constipation problems, which relates with excretion taboos. This could constitute a matter for embarrassment, seeing that excretion is usually seen as a private matter – as it is dirty –, and direct mention to it in public is avoided, in order to avoid disruption of external order (Douglas 1966: 2). The strategy followed in this ad shows awareness of this fact and presupposes an identical awareness on the part of the viewer. In a way, the ad dramatises the viewer's indirectness and subterfuge when referring socially to matters such as these – and, just like the older woman in the ad, we expect to be understood. However, this indirectness when discussing taboo – which is a sign of negative politeness – can lead to failure in communication, as instantiated by the present ad. The older woman deliberately flouts one of the maxims of Grice's Cooperative Principle, in the present case, the maxim of manner. She is being vague (Channell 1994: 131; Zhang 1998: 20–21), although she has a valid reason for acting that way. The conflict arising between the need to be perspicuous and the need to avoid mentioning taboo subjects in public justify this breach of the maxim of manner. Motivations of self-politeness, i.e. the need to keep face (Chen 2001: 90), help explain the older woman's choice for indirectness when conveying her message (Leech 1983: 80).

As we have seen, there are several markers of upper classness in the ad, and indirect politeness can be seen as one of them. In order to avoid a FTA – in the present case, referring to an embarrassing subject (Brown and Levinson 1978: 61) –, she resorts to this strategy and assumes that the other intervenient in the dialogue will understand her obliqueness, be equally polite and demand no further clarification (Myers 2004: 89). However, her interlocutor, the younger woman, clearly lacks the world knowledge that would enable her to understand this polite indirectness. Since her initial utterance shows she can flout the maxim of manner, she should also be able to deal with indirectness caused by avoidance of taboo subjects.

There are a number of other elements in the commercial that help the viewer identify the presence of a FTA – and would help the younger woman as well, were she in possession of the necessary world knowledge. The prosodic and kinesic hedges (reticence, hesitation, silence, raised eyebrows and furtive looks) that accompany the older woman's discourse are a clear indication of her feelings towards the subject (Brown and Levinson 1978: 172): it is something that she is definitely not willing to mention. We are here in the presence of a clear case of dramatic irony – with the comic effects it normally implies:

“Dramatic irony” [refers] to the ironic contradictions that are created when the internal and external communication systems conflict with each other. This always



happens whenever the superior awareness of the audience adds an additional layer of meaning to either the verbal utterance or the non-verbal behaviour of a figure on stage in such a way as to contradict or undermine the meaning intended by that figure. It is thus possible to talk of both verbal and non-verbal dramatic irony. (Pfister 1988: 56)

The use of television, with its multimode potential allows for the emphasizing of taboo possibilities in this commercial. It assumes the form of a very simple narrative, where the tale consists, as we have seen, of a communicative situation that, unexpectedly, is interrupted by an unsuccessful implicature. The sense of taboo is effectively heightened by this choice of medium, which also allows for the depiction of the flow of indirectness in the dialogue spatiotemporally. The flow of indirectness in the dialogue can be roughly represented by the following diagram:

**Table 14.** Spatiotemporal flow of indirectness in the dialogue

<b>Reticence</b> “The easier it is to...”	<b>Request for more direct information</b> “The easier it is to do what?”	<b>Clarification by means of:</b> – v e r b a l vagueness “...to...go...” – hand gesture – facial expression	<b>Apparent grasping of indirect message</b> “Oh! I see!”  <b>Request for direct information</b> “Go where?”	<b>Total retreat into silence</b> (communication of taboo content by these means proves impossible)
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The very same thing that initiated the cycle, i.e. the product itself, finally solves this retreat into silence. The older woman’s offer of the package of Fibre 1 and simultaneous comment can prove slightly puzzling for a non-Portuguese viewer, in that she is offering the product to the other as a cure for a specific problem. The fact is that, so far, the commercial led the viewer to believe that Fibre 1 is a cure for constipation problems, and there is nothing to indicate that the younger woman has them. A Portuguese viewer, however, when hearing the older woman’s comment, could be reminded of Portuguese popular expressions that can work, in the present case, in a complementary way. These are (a) *ser tapada* – literally “to be clogged”, which corresponds roughly to the English expression “to be obtuse” and (b) *ter falta de chá* (“to be lacking in tea / not to have drunk enough tea”), which means approximately “to be ill-bred” or “not to be aware of social conventions”. Both expressions can be applied to the younger woman, in that she (1) effectively lacks world knowledge to understand the indirectness – she is “obtuse”, and (2) is incapable of reading the prosodic markers of a taboo subject, she insists on clarification



– a sure sign of ill-breeding. In fact, both expressions can be etymologically related with absorption and elimination by means of bodily orifices, which provides the necessary figurative connection with the constipation problem that would help make sense of the comment. Also, the slightly exasperated tone in which it is said provides a sort of comic relief to the tenseness of a situation that had reached an absolute impasse.

Therefore, to avoid breaking the taboo, the older woman resorts to a strategy of moving ahead of it. Firstly, she dislocates possession of the “problem” to the other woman – “It will solve *your* problem” –, placing herself on safe ground as an observer; and she then anticipates the solution to a problem that she has never explicitly mentioned, doing it both by word and gesture, thus foregrounding the product’s qualities. Her comment and gesture are a living example of how to deal gracefully with an embarrassing situation such as this, escaping a tight corner by mentioning the very same product that first brought the taboo subject to the conversation.

The endline – “The name is Fibre 1 from Nestle. You don’t need to say anything else” – reinforces this circularity. Apart from its benefits (good taste and high content in fibre), the product also avoids the necessity of mentioning unpleasant bodily functions. The name “Fibre 1” is thus instituted as a token of several advantages for its user. It is ideal for (1) those with constipation problems; (2) those who want to avoid having them, and (3) those who dislike mentioning such things in public. The product is a polite form of encoding all this and saving face.

### **Visual emphasis of taboo: Abraço ad**

The pictorial metaphor that can be found in the non-commercial ad for Abraço (Fig 22) is rather straightforward. The fact that the ad is in black and white makes it stand out from the surrounding ads in an average commercial break. This is an effective attention-catching device in an ad that must, by definition, change the frequent habit of having unprotected sexual relationships. The Martini commercial (Fig 29) also uses the black and white strategy and imagery of death, even if the product and the approach chosen in the Martini campaigns indicates a taste for extra-marital sex. The apparent parallelism will be discussed again in the section dedicated to ads for non-taboo products that deliberately foreground taboo with the help of visuals and music. This choice of colour might also present some relevant contributions to the meanings conveyed by the pictorial metaphor. The vulture in the ad is all the better related with death when its black colour is taken into consideration. In Western cultures, black is traditionally associated with mourning and is the colour of ill omen. The pictorial metaphor VULTURE IS DEATH

(BY AIDS) works, then, by means of the negative charge of the colour chosen and also by means of the symbolic associations conveyed by the vulture (Cirlot [1969] 2000: 56). Vultures function as a living embodiment of the abstract concept of death. They also present a dynamic quality that fully serves the purposes of the ad: their flying over the embracing couple and their slow approach as the young people kiss and caress illustrate the notion that “death is always around the corner”. Their flying away, scared by the sound of the condom package being opened, demonstrates that “it is up to each of us to keep it at bay.” There is an underlying concept of this being a decision taken by the couple without interference from strangers, in a sort of self-management of personal appetites, as demanded by the characteristics of the disease (Sontag 1991: 163). This could prove important for the age group targeted in this ad – is further marked by the loneliness of the beach and the absence of any other human being in the scene. The characterisation of a target audience in the early twenties is also achieved by means of the type of music used. This is a clearly “modern” and catchy tune with English lyrics, which for a Portuguese viewer of that age is very often connoted as “hip” and “cool”.

The short staccato sentences at the end of the ad come as a final written comment that embodies the ideas already conveyed by pictorial means. They also reinforce the importance of the condom as a way of defeating AIDS, an idea that had already been aurally transmitted by the sudden stopping of the music before the condom appears and the shot-like sound it produces when opening. This aural isolation of the condom in the visual space of the ad corresponds to the verbal isolation of the word *preservativo* (condom) in the last images. The fact that this sentence is constituted by a single word placed at the head of the group of two sentences makes it especially meaningful (Rush 1998: 156). It is as if all the action that was portrayed visually was finally channelled into this verbal conclusion in black lettering against a white background.

In the verbal message as in the visual one, there is no room for grey areas of indecision and hesitation. Condoms *have to* be worn, as the “compulsory” tells us in the second sentence. This brusque staccato style can also be appealing to the target age of the commercial, since it elides the majority of elements in the sentence apart from the ones that convey the core active meanings (Leech 1966: 96). Also, even though it presupposes a question-answer structure (Cook 1992: 174–175), the question part is omitted, which makes the ad lose a possibly excessive didactic edge that could displease the intended audience. Full, grammatically correct sentences or even a set of questions posed by the “inexperienced” young people being answered by an older “Dr Know It All” would probably make the ad lose its impact for this age target – which, incidentally, is a method often used in ads concerned with public health issues like AIDS (Jobling 1997: 159).

### Visual and musical cues for playing up taboo: Impulse and Sanex Ads

The ad for Impulse (Fig 23) is based on a series of pictorial metaphors whose second term is always the same.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the ad achieves its aim by means of the cumulative effect of the tropes that prepare the way the bottle of deodorant is to be interpreted at the end of the ad. On the other hand, some ads seem to function merely based on a seductive aesthetic appeal, without the hint of any narrative structure: that is the case of the Sanex ad (Fig 24).

The Impulse commercial diverts the viewers' attention from its own taboo charge – that has to do with bodily smells – by using reiterative pictorial metaphors that clearly steer interpretation towards the area of sexuality. This is done in a very light-hearted manner, through a series of interrelated pictorial metaphors, which is accentuated by the music chosen. In fact, this ad would fit into the “humour” category in the section about narrative below, and it is only studied in this section in some detail due to the richness of the metaphors it presents.

The first of these is LIFTED PENCIL IS ERECTING PENIS; the second is FEATHER FLYING UPWARDS IS ERECTING PENIS, and the third can be enounced as CLOCK HAND MOVING UP IS ERECTING PENIS. In all these cases, the second term of the metaphor can be grasped with the help of visual indications. The embarrassed smile on the model's face as he looks down, the surprised expression of the young woman when she puts on her glasses and looks down at the reclining man, the furtive half-smiles of the students around them, all indicate the existence of a taboo. There are also aural clues (the police sirens) that mark urgency and the existence of something out of the ordinary. They can also function as a hint of censorship, which reinforces the presence of taboo.

The ad is structured around a continuous oscillation between *up* and *down*. The inferred upward motion of the model's penis – suggested by the three pictorial metaphors referred above – is accompanied by a general movement of “looking down”. This is explicable, in practical and immediate terms, because of the fact that the phenomenon is happening “down there”, since the young man is reclining. However, this oscillation yields important information in terms of taboo. Sex is taboo mainly because of the ambiguous feelings it evokes. There is attraction because it corresponds to a basic human need, but there is negation of its real importance in life when it is treated as something shameful and private (Steiner ([1956] 1999).

This upward and downward movement also parallels outside-inside spheres that are usually kept apart (Douglas [1975] 1999: 112–113). The following scheme displays the axes along which the ad is constructed; it shows some of the

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1. This ad was also broadcast in English in Britain.

meanings that are commonly inferred from them and that are relevant for this analysis, and the way they are conveyed by the ad:

**Table 15.** Structural axis, inferences and forms of conveyance in the ad

AXIS	INFERENCES	IN THE AD
– Up	– Upper, “nobler” parts of the body	– Focus on the actors’ heads and torsos
– Down	– Lower, “shameful” parts of the body	– Conveyed by pictorial metaphors and body language
– Outside	– Clothes	– The students (normality)
– Inside	– Naked person	– The male model (the exception)
– Public	– Normal, civilised behaviour	– Students’ behaviour
– Private	– Animal instincts, sexual attraction	– Male model’s involuntary reaction

All these axes are finally concentrated under the ingenious form of the last pictorial metaphor in the ad: BOTTLE OF IMPULSE IS ERECT PENIS. This bottle appears as the logical conclusion of the process that had evolved throughout the previous scenes in the ad:

**Table 16.** Evolution of metaphorical meaning in a visual metaphor

PENIS= (1) *erecting/pencil* → *erecting/feather* → *erecting/clock hand* → *erected/bottle*

The coincidence that allows for the use of the deodorant bottle as the first term of this pictorial metaphor – similarity in shape, upright position and even colour – is also, in itself, a means of reuniting the axial contrasts that support the functioning of the ad. A deodorant is meant for neutralising something that, literally, perspires from the inside of the body. The neutralising of the unpleasant smell and the perfume of the deodorant are necessary to make the product belong definitely to the outside sphere – rather in the same way a perfume would be worn. In fact, in the Impulse ad, it is the scent of the deodorant that triggers the model’s involuntary reaction. This fact can reconcile two other poles: something that is a mark of civilisation (the wearing of perfume in order to hide our natural smells and make ourselves more attractive) causes uncivilised behaviour in others. The Impulse deodorant functions in the same way clothes do. Both are protective layers that cover and reveal at the same time (Barthes [1967] 1981: 262).

What the ad does, in using a naked male model as a focal point of the event, is to withdraw the covering layers for a few moments. This unveiling makes the

viewers – those inside the ad and the ones at home – come to terms with their own reactions when the usually rigid frontiers between *up* and *down*, *inside* and *outside*, *public* and *private* are suddenly confused.

The Sanex ad (Fig 24) matches the definition of “narcissistic ads”. It has neither verbal metaphors nor plot. In fact, it rests almost exclusively on the strength of the images it presents but does not resort to pictorial metaphors in order to establish a verbal-like rhetorical format. The only possible metaphor in this type of ads would be a much-stylised form of pictorial metaphor, where the seductive images these ads present symbolise their own capacity of seduction and a reflection of the viewer’s narcissistic desires (González Requena and Ortiz de Zárate 1995: 42; Arconada 1997: 48). The second term of the metaphor might, therefore, be understood as a representation of “something else”, – which allows the establishment of a metaphorical relationship – even if its concretisation is, after all, dependent on the individual wishes and fantasies of the person watching the ad.

Also, there is no plot that can establish a situation of narrative plausibility, and no noticeable temporal progression that marks the dynamics of narration (González Requena 1988; González Requena and Ortiz de Zárate 1995: 23–24). The ad is constructed on the succession of scenes that present slight variations on the same theme – KISSING ARMPITS. The ad might function as a sort of “descriptive pause” (Genette [1972] 1979: 94), which could make it stand out from an entourage of ads structured as narratives. The action depicted presents a number of taboo implications, related as it is with sweating (and the inside-outside transitions we have seen in the Impulse ad) and kissing – which implies the possibility of something that belongs outside passing to the inside. However, this display of taboo possibilities inherent to the product is neutralised by the aestheticised perspective used in the ad. All the images are in black and white, which conveys a sense of distance from everyday life and is often connoted with an artistic aura. The lips approach the armpits in slow motion, in order to show that each single movement is important. In fact, the ad corresponds to a “prolonged gaze” (Hamon [1972] 1976: 65–66) on the part of the characters depicted, which is then echoed by the prolonged gaze of the viewers, who witness the slowed-down scenes. Lastly, the background music helps in transmitting an ethereal sense, as if the strictly bodily dimension was being replaced for something more spiritual and elevated – hence the clean and stripped-sown effect achieved by the ad.

Apart from this dilution of the taboo charge carried by the product advertised by the foregrounding of the aesthetic aspects, this commercial also plays with other taboo-related inferences. The scenes depicted always take place between a man and a woman, who are presumably alone. Even if the atmosphere is extremely sanitised and proper, the intimacy of the gesture makes it suggestive of a close physical relationship between each of the couples – and the kissing of intimate

places such as armpits could be read as a metaphor for preliminaries before a sexual act. On the other hand, this could be only a social kiss – and the armpit could be a metaphor for “face”. In this case, the message would be that, with Sanex, armpits are so clean that you can greet other people by kissing them there instead of on the cheek. This interpretation is supported by the fact that all the actors are wearing clothes, which apparently contradicts the previous interpretation of sexual intimacy. However, this foregrounding and denial of taboo brings with it an ambiguity that is intentional. Further proof of the first reading can be found in the fact that there are no kissing scenes between two women, but only between men and women – and kiss-on-cheek greetings are the norm in both cases for Portuguese people. In an ad that presents three almost identical scenes, it might be expected that the maximum number of social greetings involving cheek kissing would be portrayed. The insistence on the couples formed by a man and a woman reinforces the first reading, increasingly more so with each reiterative scene. Added evidence that supports the second reading and that emphasises the social aspect could be found on the elaborate necklace and sophisticated blouse worn by Young Woman 3 or even on the white-collar worn by Man 1. These could lead in interpretation, once again, to a definitely non-taboo reading. These clothes are all clearly meant to be displayed in public – like armpits can be, once they are treated with Sanex.

In spite of their very different forms of functioning, both ads in this section provide interesting examples of the way visuals and music can combine in order to foreground taboo in an intentional manner. The Impulse ad resorts to a number of pictorial metaphors, and the music and background sounds are a form of stressing the taboo interpretations already encased in them. In the Sanex ad, both visuals and music convey a sense of elegance and spiritual detachment that transforms the taboo of sexuality explored in the ad into something graceful and ethereal.

## Non-taboo ads

### Visual cues of taboo: Skip Aloe Vera

In some ads with no previous taboo connotations, a hint of taboo is introduced by means of visual cues. In these cases, pictorial metaphors are often used to associate the taboo with the product advertised. A commercial for sun tanning lotion broadcast in Portugal at the same time as the one analysed in this section presents a couple engaged in activities that resemble the behaviour of the two young people in the Abraço ad. However, and even though the scenery chosen is the same – a deserted beach – the functioning of both ads rests on different types of pictorial

metaphors. In the Abraço ad, the understanding of the simple replacement of the second term of the metaphor (death) by the first (vultures) is the only operation necessary to make sense of the message. In the sun filter commercial, the full understanding of the parallelism intended between safe sex and safe sunbathing rests on the interpretation of the two pictorial metaphors on which it is based. The first, which develops throughout the first scenes, approximates the areas of sex and sunbathing. The pictorial metaphor TO RUB SUNSCREEN ON THE BODY IS TO ENGAGE IN SEXUAL PRELIMINARIES is complemented by a sub-pictorial metaphor whose reading is not as immediately evident as the first but that is explained when the notion of “protection” is introduced in the later scenes.

There is a striking similarity between the Abraço ad and the sun screen commercial in this point. Although in the former the condom is shown directly and in the later the condom is only suggested by means of a pictorial metaphor, both appear at a crucial moment in the ads – after the first preliminaries and before love-making/sunbathing and when there is eye-contact between the couples, i.e. in moments of heightened intimacy. This shows that something that apparently comes between the person and unmitigated enjoyment and pleasure can be advertised in positive terms. Although the Abraço ad is sombre in tone and the sun screen commercial is full of sunshine and bright contrasting colours, both stories have a happy ending: two relationships that run smoothly because of protection. This happens between two partners (who have AIDS-free sex) and between sun and sunbather (which allows cancer-free sun exposure for the couple). The sun screen ad deliberately presents an erotic message – which is a taboo by itself – and parallels the structure of ads that occupy a special place in advertising because of their need to talk about the most intimate sexual habits of people. As in the print ad in the same campaign, this sun screen ad adds to its own slighter taboo charge the more evident taboo issue of AIDS.

The reading of the succession of pictorial metaphors in this ad presupposes the viewers’ familiarity with the non-commercial ads that try to change behaviours, since the sun filter’s function is the same as a condom would have. It is a sort of protective sheath against disease, and hence the conflation with ads from AIDS campaigns. The real differences between those two commercials that present so many similarities lie in the non-commercial perspective of one of them and the commercial aims of the other.

Whereas the former advertises the use of condoms in general as a means to prevent AIDS, the latter advertises the use of one particular brand to avoid skin cancer. Although this type of pastiche by a commercial ad of public health ads can be criticised as an example of the omnivorous nature of ads (Williamson 1978: 165), the fact remains that both aim to change behaviours that can put life at risk – even if it involves buying this brand of sun tanning lotion in order to do so, in one of the cases.



The ad chosen for analysis in this section, an ad for Skip Aloe Vera (Fig 25) implies special classification problems. It is an ad for a clothes detergent, which would seem to place it in a similar position to the Skip detergent ad analysed before, i.e. a product connected with the taboo of dirtiness that has to find an interesting approach to divert the viewers' attention from what is unpleasant. However, the fact that this Skip is also "Aloe Vera" places the product outside the normal semantic area of *stains* and *dirtiness* usually associated with clothes detergents. The emphasis seems to be on the product's pleasant smell and velvety touch, since aloe vera is often used in skin care and cosmetic products. Therefore, this product is being marketed as a sort of pleasurable, sensuous treatment for clothes that will be used next to the skin, and not so much as a means to get rid of difficult stains (Torres 2004: 279). In fact, it is the skin and the effect clothes washed with Skip Aloe Vera will have on it that are being foregrounded here.

What we can see in this ad is an initial strategy of sidestepping a taboo inherent to the product (dirtiness) by means of a deliberate suggestion of another taboo (nakedness and sexuality). This hint of taboo is suggested by visual means, but also kept under control by them. The visual elements used make the ad stand out from the rest in a commercial break, and are mainly connected with this central idea of skin and sensuality.

The series of visual metaphors present in the ad are related with the idea of naturalness, be that in the naked bodies or in the unspoilt nature that surrounds them (Freitas 2004b: 300–301). This concept of idyllic naturalness is extended to the product used to make the clothes/flowers blossom. These "flowers" open their "petals" as drops of Skip Aloe Vera drip on them, as if it were water. They are thus refreshed, enlivened, embellished, nourished, brighter and healthier. This final effect of Skip Aloe Vera/water on clothes/flowers has been prepared by the sequence of pictorial metaphors and by the voice-over and that is why the parallelism between the two terms of the metaphor makes sense in the universe of this ad.

The idea of sensual pleasure is clearly depicted in the ad. Firstly, it is conveyed by the admiring looks the naked people give to these flowers/clothes, and their appreciative faces as they smell them. Sensuality is foregrounded when they start to wrap their naked bodies in these fragrant clothes. However, the fact that the images in the ad are cartoons transforms this sensuality into a naïve and endearing sequence, a reading that is corroborated by the soft Hawaiian-like music, and by the presence of a toddler covering himself with a cloth washed with Skip Aloe Vera. With the use of the visual element of drawing, the problems real nakedness could present are then neutralized, and the slightly humorous tone of the scenes depicted makes the hints of taboo perfectly acceptable and even amusing for the viewer.



### **Visual and textual cues of taboo through humorous narrative: TMN ad**

In some ads, taboo is hinted at both by combined visual and textual cues, thus achieving a humorous effect. This is also the case of a Portuguese ad for a gas company, which presents several relevant points for a study of taboo. Firstly, the man who addresses the camera is the easily recognisable character of a very sanctimonious censor created by a famous Portuguese comedian. This character always censors taboos that involve sexuality, even if he is secretly fascinated by them. Secondly, the ad presents an uncommon and ingenious reflection about its own strategies of recourse to taboo as a way of attracting viewers. Thirdly, it uses humour as a form of reintroducing a hint of taboo after having explicitly rejected it as a valid advertising strategy for this particular company.

Using this famous comedian in the ad presents the advantages associated with endorsements by well-known personalities. However, the fact that he appears not as himself but as one of his characters protects the ad from some drawbacks a traditional endorsement might bring, since the likeability and believability evoked by the person who endorses the product are not necessarily the same (Wells et al 1998: 267). What happens in this ad is a famous comedian playing the role of a character that is also famous in his own right, something that finally comes to signify a double endorsement.

The ad is constructed along the same lines as the fictional scenes where this character stars. In the comedy series where he first appeared, he functioned as an external observer who intervened in every scene he found too daring or indecent. However, in his justifications for interrupting scenes on the grounds of immorality (be that sexuality, religious matters, or even bad language), it was obvious that he himself was obsessed with sexual matters. In the case of this ad, that would be the pun with the expression “gas bottle”, which, in Portuguese, can also mean someone’s bottom. The ad uses the special – and widely known – characteristics of this man to dismantle the expectations of the viewers about the use of gratuitous sex in ads. In fact, the way the ad begins leads the viewer to expect a strong current of sexuality that is used in a more or less devious manner to add a sheen of excitement and sinful transgression to the product (Odber de Baubeta 1995: 95). This idea is further emphasised by the sensual background music.

The interruption of the scene functions as a shattering of the frame that the viewer had already construed for the ad. Simultaneously, the viewer is plunged into another fictional world, that of a specific comedy series – a fact that confirms the previous assertion that, nowadays, ads merge increasingly more with the surrounding genres (Fairclough 1997). This interruption functions as a recoiling of the camera from a fictional scene in order to show the director in action. This is a form of denouncing the fictional character of every narrative – by plunging the viewer into another (obviously) fictional story. Therefore, we can say that the ad is

structured around different narrative levels, each of which represents another layer for possible taboo readings (Bal 1977: 10).

In having the initial scenes interrupted, the ad makes the viewer obey the rules established by the other genre, that of the comedy series. Based on previous knowledge of the series, the viewer will expect some hypocritical observation about the inappropriateness of the whole situation, followed by some impromptu observation that will spoil everything. Most of all, the viewer will expect to be amused by this intervention. That is one of the functions of humour, in comedy series or in ads: to ensure that we belong to the same group, and that we partake of a similar and cohesive culture (Bowes 1990: 137; Chiaro 1992: 5).

This ad involves some degree of inferencing in order to understand the ways taboo is suggested, sidestepped and afterwards suggested again, and this contributes to a degree of indirectness that would appeal to an audience that enjoys being challenged in this manner (Short and Hu 1997: 495; Simpson 2001: 601).

Another good example of this strategy can be seen in the television ad for TMN mobile phones (Fig 26), a product with no taboo connotations. In this ad, visual elements such as the young woman's rapturous face as she talks and the words she is saying into her mobile phone, as well as the old lady's indignant expression deliberately steer interpretations towards sexual taboo.

In this ad, humour arises from misinterpretation. In the situation depicted, taboo interpretations are only possible because the old lady sitting at the other table at the café can only hear what is being said, but is not able to see whom the young woman is addressing. Almost until the end of the ad, the viewer shares this limited range of vision, which justifies the construing of provisional sexual scripts that are finally contradicted.

In the first part of the ad, everything indicates that we are witnessing a MALE STRIP TEASE BY VIDEO PHONE or SEX BY PHONE sequence. This understanding is triggered, as is usual in jokes with this type of script, by very specific lexical items (Raskin 1985: 177), such as "dick" and "bottom". The humorous effect also derives from the old lady's shocked expression as she listens in to the other woman's conversation. The punch line is finally delivered as a final twist (the young woman is talking to her husband about their baby) and this revelation is made purely by visual means – as befits an ad for a product that foregrounds "real image in real time".

As in the case of the mobile phone user, no words are necessary to clarify what is really happening, whereas the traditional mobile phone, where only words can be exchanged, will always leave something out. As we can see, this narrative enclosed in a joke format is really trying to demonstrate that "an image is worth more than a thousand words". In this way, this dramatization makes the most of the medium being used (TV) and, at the same time, demonstrates to the full the potentialities of the product advertised.

Table 17. Comparing the humour in the television ad with the traditional formula of the joke

TMN television ad	Joke (usual reactions from the audience in brackets)
<p>VISUAL ELEMENTS: The absence of music throughout the development draws the viewers' attention to the story about to be played; the panoramic shot of the café shows the two women's position and behaviour;</p> <p>VISUAL + TEXTUAL ELEMENTS: The viewer is immediately immersed into the young woman's dialogue with her invisible interlocutor. Her words, gestures and facial expressions introduce a sexual script. The repeated shots of the old lady's disapproving face mark the rhythm of the telling of this joke, in the same way pauses and nervous giggles often intercalate traditional joke telling. They also reinforce an interpretation connected with taboo, as the giggling would. When the Young Woman turns to the Old Lady and explains who she has been talking to, the latter is identified as the source of taboo readings, since explanations have to be given to her. She stands for the malicious audience that would be giggling during the telling of a joke.</p> <p>VISUAL ELEMENTS (CONFIRMED BY TEXTUAL ELEMENTS): The punchline / solution is immediately delivered by showing the screen of the mobile phone, and later corroborated by the voice-over.</p>	<p><b>Introduction:</b> Listen to this, it's a good one. You have two women sitting in a café. The younger one is talking to someone on a mobile video phone, and the older one is drinking coffee, sitting at another table nearby.</p> <p><b>Narrative development:</b> Then the young woman starts to ask the person she is talking to to undress (<i>giggles</i>), first the trousers, then the drawers, then says she wants to see the bottom and the dick (<i>giggles</i>), with an increasingly bigger smile, and making appreciative comments every time. The old lady, who is listening in to all of this, feels very shocked, of course (<i>giggles</i>). Now, imagine her surprise when the young woman turns to her with a big smile on her face and tells her that all the time she has been talking to her husband (<i>giggles</i>). And now I tell you that she is telling the truth, and what's more, it wasn't an obscene call at all. So what do you make of this? What had she been doing, then? (<i>guesses from the audience, none of them correct</i>)</p> <p><b>Punchline / Solution:</b> Well, it turns out that she had been talking to her husband, all right, but she was only telling him how to change their baby boy's diaper! (<i>laughter / exasperated groans</i>)</p>

The combined use of the textual and visual means allows both the narration of the joke and the visualisation of the hearers' reaction to its telling. The following scheme explains the progress of this dramatization, while comparing it to the traditional formula of the joke (see Table 17 above).

As we can see from the above table, this ad explicitly demonstrates the advantages of having this kind of mobile phone, by showing us a situation where visual contact is extremely important. This demonstration could easily have been made with many other examples. Choosing this particular one allows this ad to play in a humorous manner on the misunderstandings that can arise when people are restricted to only hearing something when both hearing and seeing would be

essential. The joke format is a particularly apt form of illustrating this, since it is very often based on withholding some information or providing ambiguous information, so as to allow a sudden and surprising script switch when it comes to the punchline (Raskin 1985 :114). What this ad is telling us, with the help of this apparent breach of taboo, is that an even more comprehensive perspective can be achieved, when it comes to communicating with others.

### Sounds and speech as cues for taboo: Combi ad

The Combi ad chosen to illustrate this section (Fig 27) is one of a series of very similar ads. They are all based on embarrassment caused by abdominal noises that indicate hunger. In all of them, this noise appears as something to be ashamed of. Once again, as in the deodorant ads studied in the previous sections, something that belongs inside (the sound made by organs connected with digestion and excretion) is leaking to the outside. What should be contained inside the boundaries of the body is suddenly made visible – and, in this case, audible – to the person in question and to the people around.

The uneasiness caused by this situation can be inferred from the twisted smile of the sufferer and the conspiratorial whispers of the two women sitting next to her. However, the taboo effect is heightened by the words of the two women – which are repeated in all the ads of the same series. In fact, saying “What a lack of Combi!” (in Portuguese *Que falta de Combi!*) with the intonation used by the two women brings inevitably to the mind of a Portuguese person another expression: *Que falta de educação!* (literally, “What a lack of manners!”, for which the British equivalent would be something like “That’s gross!”). For the purposes of this ad, the word “manners” was removed from this Portuguese expression and the empty slot then filled with the name of the product (Williamson 1978: 137). In this way, Combi comes to be equated with “manners”, i.e. with what is proper, categorised and clearly delimited. In the final scenes of the ad, as she eats the yoghurt, the woman has lost her guilty expression, satisfied her hunger and done something crucial for her body. With the help of Combi, the frontiers are re-established again.

In this ad for a totally non-taboo product, taboo is firstly introduced by sound. Afterwards, the sentence accentuates the taboo reading because of the form it echoes so closely a Portuguese expression reserved for disgusting or morally offending situations.

### Visual and musical cues for playing up taboo: Martini ad

The Martini commercial (Fig 28) presents a sort of “auro-pictorial metaphor” (Forceville 1995: 225), which can be discerned in the combination of dramatic music and sounds with the image of a woman in black that comes to signify impending death. In fact, the ad presents very few textual elements, apart from the word *Martini* written on the bottle being served to the young man. It would even be possible to argue that this ad does not conform to one of the conditions described for the selection of ads for analysis in this book. The scarcity of linguistic elements seems to be comparable to that we can find in some Benetton ads, which were excluded for the same reason. However, there are several reasons to justify the inclusion of the Martini ad in the group of ads selected: (1) this ad was part of a series that presented a story-like enchainment, which provided a “textual” background that is absent from the ads excluded. Also, (2) even though it was not used in the present ad, this campaign by Martini (which included leaflets, posters, ashtrays, and special point-of sale promotions) always displayed the same slogan, “Viva la vita, baby”, and any of their ads is therefore associated with it.

This ad presents an unusual association between the taboos of sex and death. In the non-commercial ad for Abraço, those two taboos were reunited because the issue at stake – AIDS – forced the ad to display the connection between both. However, in the Martini ad, the connection between sexuality and death is intentional. The possibility of death appears as a direct consequence of the adulterous love affairs in which the Martini Man has starred in a number of previous ads. In the present case, death does not come as the result of a fatal sexually transmitted disease. Rather, it comes in the shape of a beautiful female hired gun working under the orders of a deceived husband – a character that we also know from other Martini ads, as well.

The idea of extra-marital, casual and adventurous sex is conveyed, as we have seen, by the traditional format of Martini ads – and the message is that, for people who drink Martini, that will be a natural consequence of the added glamour achieved by drinking it. It is something people that are young, attractive, reckless and wild will do every time they have an opportunity (Berger 1972: 144). Even the idea of death, disruptive as it usually is, appears as another female conquest of the Martini Man. In fact, he masters it effectively and gracefully, by throwing away the poisoned gift to an unwary young man. Death appears as something that can be played with and finally tricked, unlike what happened in the Abraço ad, where death was something serious and menacing.

The black and white images – also a constant in this series of Martini ads – convey an atmosphere of film noir, which is further stressed by the background music. In fact, a crime is about to be committed, as the jazzy music anticipates. The lucky

escape in the end is further accentuated by the strident saxophone sound. In the case of this ad, death comes as a punishment for the anti-social behaviour of this dangerous but fascinating *agent provocateur*, who presents a number of polluting possibilities that can also contaminate others (Douglas [1975] 1999: 113). This is an attempt by society to chastise deviation that threatens the “proper” order of things. Naturally, in an ad meant for a young and pleasure-seeking audience, society is finally baffled in the confrontation, and the Martini Man is once again the winner.

For a Portuguese viewer, this Martini ad is seen as one more in a series of very similar ads, and this contributes to the full understanding of what is happening. In fact, this narrative is another chapter in a long story, and the viewer is already aware of the young man’s marginal status. The inferences necessary to follow the rapid changes of scene are helped by the background music. That is an alternation between the elegant, jazzy, sensual tune of all the Martini campaign, and the strident staccato violin notes that mark danger, together with visual cues such as the number 13 in the woman’s room key. The linguistic elements in this ad are minimised. However, the message of the ad can be summarised in the words that are normally associated with the merchandising of this product: “Viva la vita, baby” – Enjoy life, baby, by daring socially imposed taboos and exploiting the creative possibilities of transgression.

## Conclusion

The strategies at the service of television ads when they need to disguise taboo or they want to associate a given taboo to their product are, as we have seen, more numerous and complex than those at the disposal of magazine ads. The technological possibilities of the medium allow for the expansion of some rhetorical resources used in magazine ads, such as pictorial metaphors, narratives, and suggestive copy and images. Other resources are exclusive to audio-visual media such as television, film and radio, as is the case of speech and intonation, sound effects and music. Therefore, the analyses in the present chapter are divided according to strategies other than text and image, which were the categories used in the previous chapter to classify the ways taboo can be foregrounded or downplayed. Each of the ads was analysed according to its most salient characteristic, even if that implied a simplification of other interesting elements they might contain. In fact, the ad for Martini presents a complexity that would enable it to reappear in other categories apart from the one where it was placed.

The type of analysis undertaken in the previous chapter was also applied to this one. However, the fact that there are more channels available in television than in magazines makes a multi-modal approach even more complex, since it is more

difficult to submit music and sound “texts” to a structural analysis. However, all these elements present meaningful content on their own – even if it is sometimes difficult to describe them in objective terms – and they contribute, as in the case of the Martini ad, towards establishing the basis of narratives that are necessarily condensed and stylised. The study of all these elements in an integrated manner leads to a better understanding of the way meaning can be conveyed in ads. Different readers and viewers of these ads will build meaning according to the clues and conditionings established by the ad itself, according to their personal perceptions of society and the products advertised, but also on the knowledge they have of the tradition established by advertising of similar products. Linguistic or structural analysis of the type depicted in the present work tries to uncover some of the ways meaning can be achieved through two main channels: what meaning the advertiser intended to convey and what meaning(s) the viewer builds through the input of subjectivity, emotions and interpretive effort in the interaction with the ad.

Once again, the strategies used in ads for taboo products that avoid display of taboo and the ones used in ads for non-taboo products that have chosen to be associated with a taboo are superficially the same, since the same means are used. However, the aims they intend to achieve are diametrically opposite. As we have seen, taboo and non-taboo ads present, respectively, a downplaying or deliberate evocation of taboo. When the product advertised contains an embarrassing taboo, the mentioning of taboo is indirect and within the limits of what is necessary for the ad to be intelligible. That is the case with the ads for Colhogar, Scottex, and Harpic, connected as they are with taboos of excretion and dirtiness. These ads present rather extreme examples of indirectness, since the approach chosen – use of children and animals and parody of action films – merely presents a loose and marginal connection with the product advertised. Even when it is necessary to mention the taboo in a more explicit manner, as in the Abraço ad, the approach is still rather indirect. The word ‘death’ is never mentioned and it only appears by means of a pictorial metaphor. Other ads, however, make the most of the taboo potential the product contains. The Impulse ad or even the ad for Sanex would be good examples of ads that manage to establish a connection between the bodily issues addressed by their products and the increased sexual possibilities allowed by their annulment with the use of the product.

In ads that foreground taboo readings on purpose, taboo is mentioned in a more explicit manner, even if the suggestiveness is controlled in the other channels available. In the ads chosen to illustrate the different strategies used, sexuality is the taboo invoked, in an effort to add glamour, elegance and seduction to the product (Berger 1972: 144), as in the case of the ads for Martini and Skip Aloe Vera, or as a form of good-humoured reflection about the increased powers of communication, as in the TMN ad. In the other ad in this category, the

foregrounding of a particular taboo (abdominal noises) functions as a means of highlighting the properties of the product as a re-establisher of the proper order of things. In this sense, it functions rather in the same way the Canesten ad in the previous chapter did.

The present chapter illustrates the way in which television ads make the most of all the means the medium allows in order to play down or play up taboos according to the needs of the advertiser. These ads can intertwine visuals, text, speech, sound effects, and music and, therefore, they can pack into thirty seconds an extremely high number of cues, suggestions and inferences at the service of taboo. The next chapter summarises the way the potentialities of magazines and television have to be used to the full when the product at stake is connected with one of the most deep-rooted taboos: sanitary protection ads.








Visuals (actions and written words)	Spoken words	Music	Key frames
LS of room. Puppies scattered and playing with each other. LS of screen, several Ps looking at it. CS of P looking at screen MS of screen, arrows indicating characteristics of toilet paper. <i>Written word: LARGER.</i> FS of room, Ps playing. MS of Ps, running outside. FS of Ps, leaving doghouse. FS of Ps leaving doghouse, front view. Cut to P entering bathroom. CS of Young Woman looking at mirror. Knocks over a bottle full of green liquid. CS of YW looking annoyed. FS of P, barks. Cut to FS of pack of toilet rolls and a toilet roll placed in front of it. MS of P barking. CS of YW looking at P. CS of YW's hand, cleaning spilt liquid with toilet paper.	<i>Voice over (male):</i> Good morning, Scottex patrol. Your mission is to make people's life more comfortable, with the new Scottex Wadded, the only wadded toilet paper, and so, a lot larger. Until your work is done, you cannot rest!  <i>Voice over (female):</i> The new Scottex Wadded toilet rolls. Comfortable thickness. Maximal absorption.	Instrumental music Revelation music Revelation music Adventure film music Adventure / detective film music Violins stress detective film music          Resolution	 (Puppies play with each other)  (Young Woman looks annoyed)  'The new Scottex Wadded...'

Figure 18. Scottex commercial (toilet paper)










Visuals (actions and written words)	Music	Key frames
FS of Young Man and Young Woman running in the sand. YM falls. FS of sky full of vultures. XCU of YM and YW kissing. FS of sky with vultures. FS of YM lying on the sand. YW leaning over and kissing him. CS of vulture. CS of YM and YW caressing / kissing each other. FS of vulture in the sky. FS of YM and YW caressing / kissing each other. MS of vulture. CS of YM caressing YW. MS of vulture. MS of YM and YW kissing. upward angle. MS of vulture, comes closer. XCU of hand on the sand. FS of vulture on tree. FS of several vultures on tree. MS of YM and YW caressing. MS of two vultures observing them. MS of YM and YW, close together. MS of vulture, comes closer. XCU of YM and YW. YW holding individual package of condoms. Look at each other. Kiss. CS of vulture, observing them. XCU of girl tearing open the package. CS of vulture flying away. Superimposition of FS of vultures on tree flying away. <i>Written text:</i> 'Condoms. Compulsory use. Because AIDS exists.'	Instrumental + vocal Song: So good to me...so good, yeah...'  Wind blowing  Loud cries (Vultures)             Music stops Sound of pack being torn. Music is resumed. Increases intensity. Saxophone. Music fades.	 (Young Woman lying on the sand, Young Man kisses her)   (Vultures approach them)   (Young Woman holds condom

Figure 22. Abraço comercial (AIDS prevention)






Visuals (actions and written words)	Spoken words	Music	Key frames
CS of Man 1 kissing Young Woman 1's armpit.		Instrumental + vocal (very calm tune), a slightly different note repeated as in a Pan flute	
CS of YW2 kissing YW2's armpit.			(Man 1 kisses Woman 1's armpit)
CS of YW3 taking off sunglasses.			
CS of M3 kissing YW3's armpit, YW3 looks down at him. MS of bottle of Sanex	Voice over ( <i>male</i> ): Now there is an even more effective deodorant, because it absorbs the skin's humidity.		
			(Woman 2 kisses Man 2's armpit)
Written text: Sanex deodorant with micro-talcum powder. Absorbs humidity. Healthy skin.	Sanex deodorant with micro-talcum powder: it keeps your skin healthy.	Tune fades.	
			(Man 3 kisses Woman 3's armpit)

Figure 24. Sanex commercial (deodorant)



Visuals (actions and written words)	Spoken words	Music / Sound
<p>[Cartoon images]</p> <p>A green drop with the words 'Skip Aloe Vera' written on it falls into the ground and bursts. Suddenly, green plants start blossoming all over the ground.</p> <p>The flowers in the plants are coloured clothes. Naked people (men, women and children) appear in this green forest and start admiring the flowers / clothes, smelling the perfume and putting them on their bodies.</p> <p>They dance, looking happy.</p> <p>A pullover has fallen on the ground. When a woman picks it up, we see a toddler sleeping under it. Angrily, he grabs the pullover and wraps himself in it again.</p> <p>A green drop falls from a plant leaf into a box of Skip and makes the concentric green waves that appear on the front of the box.</p>	<p><i>Voice over (woman):</i> The new Skip Aloe Vera is born. It will make your clothes blossom.</p> <p><i>Voice over (woman):</i> It washes your clothes efficiently... ...and it is soft for your skin.</p> <p>New Skip Aloe Vera: a touch of natural softness in your clothes.</p> <p><i>Voice over (childlike and high-pitched):</i> Aloe...Vera!</p>	<p>Ethnic-like music played with wooden instruments. Tropical birds singing.</p>

Figure 25. Skip commercial (detergent for clothes)




Visuals (actions and written words)	Spoken words	Music	Key frames
MS of café scene. Young Woman sitting at a table, talking into a mobile video phone. Old Lady drinking coffee at a nearby table.	YW: Now pull the trousers down. Now the drawers... YW: ...Now show me the behind... Beautiful! YW: Now the dick... That's sooooo big!...	Lively music starts	
CS of OL's face looking furtively at YW. CS of OL, shaking her head in disapproval.			'That's sooooo big!...'
YW looks at the OL and smiles apologetically. YW looks at mobile phone again. CS of mobile phone's video screen, where we see a Young Man changing a baby's diaper. Alternate shots of YM changing the diaper, YW blowing kisses at the baby.	YW: I'm talking to my husband!		
MS of the two mobile phones (hers and his), one showing the YW on the screen, the other showing the baby as he looks at her.	Voice-over (male): The new third-generation TMN has arrived, with UMTS technology. The video call with real time sound and image will totally transform the way you communicate. See how you talk.		(OL shaking her head)
Against a black background, written: 'i9, 3g TMN'			
			(YM changing the baby's diaper)

Figure 26. TMN ad

Visuals (actions and written words)	Spoken words	Music
MS of Young Woman. Puts hands over stomach because of abdominal noise.		Instrumental, almost inaudible tune. 'Happy' music.
MS of two women. One leans over and whispers to the other.	Woman: What a lack of Combi!	
Cut to XCU of yoghurt being stirred with spoon.	Voice-over (male): To prevent the sudden appearance of hunger, have a Combi Danone, which nourishes your body for several hours.	
MS of YW eating yoghurt and looking down at stomach.		
Written text: 'Combi Danone. Everything you need.'	Voice-over: Combi Danone. Everything you need.	Resolution

Figure 27. Combi Danone commercial (yoghurt with cereals)

Visuals (actions and written words)	Music
CS of Martini Man, walking towards camera.	'Film-noir'-like music
Cut to CS of Old Man, moving his finger across his throat. Zoom in on throat.	
Full view of hotel and swimming pool. Zoom in on pool. MM walking towards swimming-pool bar.	
Cut to Barman, looking at MM and smiling. XCU of Martini bottle being pulled out of ice bucket. XCU of Martini glass, being filled with Martini, MM in the background, out of focus. CS of B slicing lemon with sharp knife, Young Woman reflected on the metal surface. She approaches. XCU of Martini glass, lemon slices fall in it. MM picks up glass. YW stops him from taking it to his mouth. XCU of MM's face. CS of YW's face, holds glass, looks at MM. CS of B, looking at both. CS of YW, holding glass with both hands and drinking. XCU of YW's face, opposite angle, MM in the background. MS of the group. CS of YW drinking. Stops. XCU of YW's cleavage. Takes key from inside the dress. CS of YW. Hands key to MM. His face reflected on the metal. Looks at room number (13). XCU of MM drinking. MS of bar. B points up with bottle. MM turns round.	Strident notes, indicative of danger
MS of YW leaning on the balcony of room. Cut to MM caressing his lips.	Stridency increases
BB in the background, out of focus. Cut to successive images of YW/knife. YW leaves balcony. XCU of YW's face in negative. CS of MM covering face with hand.	Normal music resumed
YW leaves balcony and re-enters room. MS of MM picking up key and leaving bar. MS of MM by pool, throwing key to a Young Man in the pool. Cut to OM in the car. Reflection of MM is seen on the car as he walks by. OM bangs his fist on car window.	Strident note No resolution. Abrupt cut.
Martini logo appears superimposed on his hand.	
<i>Written text:</i> Martini cooperates with Expo'98	

Figure 28. Martini commercial (alcoholic drink)



## CHAPTER 6

# Summarising

## Sanpro ads

Periods are not a popular dissertation subject.

Karen Houppert

No ad actually says pads are to keep blood off your pants.

Greg Myers

### Introduction

This chapter is intended as a summing-up of the strategies previously described for evading taboo. Ads for sanitary protection were chosen for this purpose because they deal, necessarily, with one of the most embarrassing social taboos: menstruation. Therefore, their approach is usually that of sidestepping the more delicate and socially offensive aspects of menstruation, by diverting the viewer's attention from them (Joannis 1965: 240). Reference to a strong taboo subject like menstruation is usually considered a face-threatening act (Brown and Levinson 1987: 67), even if it involves different degrees of embarrassment according to the people who mention it (Houppert 2000: 80–93, Cintra Torres 2006: 53). Ads for products that deal with menstruation, in their role of enlarged speech acts addressed to a multitude of viewers, have to be especially careful about their communicative situation. In order to remain on safe ground while bordering on the quicksand of this taboo, sanpro ads rely heavily on tactics such as indirectness, humour, and pictorial metaphors. In fact, these strategies are used by most ads for products that have to deal with taboos and by those that deliberately adopt a taboo approach in order to enhance the appeal of their products. What makes sanpro ads an ideal field for the study of these strategies is the fact that they often combine several of them in order to achieve their intended effect. Because of their heavy taboo charge, all of these particular ads reveal a more or less elaborate approach in the way they treat their subject, even those which appear to be more direct.

### **The social dimension of menstruation**

There are important social implications to the fact that menstruation is still viewed as a taboo. This situation has visible consequences, for instance, in the way ads for sanitary pads and tampons are designed. In order to achieve a balanced perspective on this issue, and to establish the connection between the anthropological theories on this subject referred to in Chapter Two, and its social consequences in contemporary society, the contributions of psychoanalysis and specialised journalism can also be enlightening.

Lévi-Strauss's contribution for this chapter is mainly that of providing a point of reference for the taboo of menstruation that will enable the establishment of comparisons with its prevalent understandings nowadays. Also, his findings on mediating processes and tools during the menstrual periods are relevant for the analysis of the way sanitary products are seen in ads. The ambiguous attitude displayed in many sanpro ads is elucidated by the fact that menstruation is seen both as a source of danger and power. Women's regularity is something desirable in that it symbolizes universal order but also something to be feared and hidden because of its indefinable status. This is an apparently paradoxical approach present in the sub-text of many of the ads analysed in this chapter.

Recent investigations into the social and economic factors that shape the form in which menstruation is seen complement psychoanalytical perspectives on the covering up of menstrual issues as the result of a more or less conscious male strategy designed to keep women's power under control.

This chapter presents an overview of the reasons why sanpro ads are done the way they are. The sanitary products especially designed for menstruation assume a role of mediator between the altered subject – the menstruating woman – and the community. Literally, these artefacts are an effective means of preventing the hands from touching the dangerous and defiling menstrual blood directly. Figuratively, they allow for the socialisation of the menstruating woman. Her excessive communicative situation (as Lévi-Strauss describes it to signify the contradictory signs women send in this transitional state) is duly constrained and almost obliterated, with the emphasis on the notion that menstruation days are just like any other day of the month.

This emphasis on normalcy at all costs seems to correspond to a phenomenon of hyper-socialisation, which would roughly correspond to the following development:

**Table 18.** Processes of mediation in primitive and contemporary western societies

**“Primitive” societies**

Raw state (“dangerous” menstruation) → socialised state (“controlled” menstruation)

*Mediation by fire and tools*

**Contemporary western societies**

Raw state (“embarrassing” menstruation) → hyper-socialised state (non-existing menstruation)

*Mediation by sanitary products*

If we take as reference the practices during menstrual periods in American tribes (Lévi-Strauss 1964; 1967; 1968; 1971) mentioned in Chapter One, we can observe that this kind of taboo was publicly acknowledged. Women’s obedience to strict social restrictions corresponded to a guarded avoidance behaviour on the part of the other members of the community. Nowadays, this taboo seems to have been pushed even further, in the sense that it has been internalised. In an effort to remove it from the public sphere, it is now up to the woman to bear its onus. As we will see below, the ultimate taboo for a woman is to have to admit publicly that she is menstruating, because such an admission would be shameful for her in that it would imply embarrassment for the others. The nature of the mediators women are nowadays able to resort to is also responsible for this internalisation. Pads and tampons absorb (i.e., visually nullify) menstrual blood, making it psychologically simpler to accept the fallacy of its non-existence. From that to the public pretence of the non-existence of menstruation – at least *not here* and *not now* – is only a small step. It might be thought that nowadays, in Western societies, where men and women have the same legal rights and are treated equally – if not in reality, at least ideally – that antagonism and strict separation between sexes would be partially obliterated. It can be tentatively suggested that the apparent approximation between the sexes has as corollary the reinforcement of the feeling of taboo that traditionally involves menstruation (Kristeva [1980] 1982: 71, 81, 96). It has now become literally unmentionable.

Based on the notions of defilement as something outside the margins, and therefore dangerous (Douglas 1966), psychoanalytical studies examine the reasons for considering certain items as posing a threat to the organised patterns of social life (Kristeva [1980] 1982: 70). There has been found to be a generalised concern about feminine power in communities where civil laws do not ensure equality of the sexes. When this balance is not legally guaranteed, both sexes would seem to struggle with each other for more power. Men, as traditional holders of power, try to maintain supremacy over women.

Menstrual blood is unlike the other major type of polluting element, excrement and equivalent objects. It presents a threat ‘from within’ that extends to the



inner functioning of a community which is based on strict gender differentiation (Buckley and Gottlieb 1988: 28). As Kristeva points out,

[menstrual blood] threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate and, through internalization, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference. ([1980] 1982: 71).

The present ad selection seems to indicate, however, that in a society like ours, where gender equality in terms of social power is established by law, this taboo does not disappear as might be expected. It merely assumes a different form. In fact, even though many women think that society nowadays is more open to the discussion of previously unmentionable subjects, recent investigations have concluded that it is not so. American reporter Houppert perceives the situation in the following manner:

There is a sense that attitudes are changing rapidly; that feminism has allowed women to think about their bodies differently and that taboos about menstruation have benefited from this détente. They have benefited, but the attitudes reflected in the Tampax report are not so quaint and antiquated as we might think. Using other cultural barometers – advertising, magazines aimed at the teenage market, newspaper articles, popular literature and recent, narrowly focused studies – I discovered that these myths persist. (1999: 5)

For this purpose, people involved in the sanpro industry, sanpro advertising, and women consumers were interviewed. Apart from very revealing and sometimes shocking revelations about the amount of money and veiled economical interests involved, surprising facts were revealed. Even though women resent the patronising approach of the majority of sanpro ads, they do not want explicit ads that might offend men. This is especially true in situations where it is likely that other people are present as, for instance, when watching television. A higher degree of explicitness is acceptable when the ad appears in a more private medium such as a magazine (Houppert 1999: 222). However, it is a fact that women very often resent the way sanpro ads deal with the subject of menstruation. In a group discussion sponsored by a brand that manufactures a new method of sanitary protection, women commented that the approaches to taboo used in the majority of ads reveal some repulsion about their subject (Houppert 1999: 215).

Ads are experts in feeling the pulse of consumers and integrating criticism and references to their tradition in their own body (Houppert 1999: 226). The analyses of the ads selected for this chapter show that some of them are very much aware of the fact that some women – especially the younger ones – resent the traditional subterfuges used. Therefore, they sometimes show the product being handled in public by women. On occasion, they also show women using the words “menstruation” and “period”. However, they do not get much more daring than that.

The increased explicitness happens because they are aware of resentment on the part of women in relation to traditional sanpro ads. The indirectness of the cues they still employ is due to the deep ambivalence that still characterises women's feelings on the subject and which demands some degree of reticence whenever menstruation is being discussed in public.

### Taboo-evading strategies in ads for sanitary products

Like all the other taboos discussed in the previous chapters, the taboo of menstruation is not merely something "primitive" tribes ritualised and turned into myth. Rather, it is something that we have to live with everyday and still do not know how to deal with publicly. This chapter aims to show some of the ways advertisers have found to do this when their audience is huge.

As we have seen, sanpro ads want to avoid offending male viewers and want to prevent women viewers from feeling embarrassed in front of men. Therefore, they all present some degree of indirectness in their approach. Nonetheless, if we imagine a spectrum that goes from *very indirect* to *almost direct*, sanpro ads would definitely occupy different places along it. One of the purposes of this chapter is to analyse the way menstruation is approached, either by making it sound a complete taboo, or by making it look very natural but still maintaining a degree of indirectness.

In order to classify the ads selected, we can devise a chart that indicates the two extreme positions detected in them. The ads analysed can be arranged according to a relative position along this axis. Only some of these ads are positioned at the poles, and most are to be found somewhere in the middle. After all, total indirectness is rare nowadays due to women's objections mentioned above, and being direct in this area is like tiptoeing through a minefield and therefore best avoided. This chart also indicates the main characteristics of the ads in the poles, which will then be differently combined in the other ads that do not belong so clearly in any of the extremes:

**Table 19.** Extreme positions of directness and indirectness in raising taboo

RAISING TABOO INDIRECTLY	RAISING TABOO MORE DIRECTLY
– Watching the taboo from the outside	– Watching the taboo from the inside
– Emphasis on surveillance and normality	– Emphasis on experience and feeling

Both approaches imply the existence of different relations between words and pictures and different strategies. When raising the taboo indirectly, the ad resorts to verbal and pictorial metaphors that parallel and evoke the taboo situation, which

are only to be fully understood by the consumers of the product. This functions as a sort of coded language that informs those who need the information and avoids embarrassment to others who might be watching the ad as well. The ultimate aim of this ad is to show women how to maintain an appearance of normality. Therefore, they appear in those ads even more “normal” than they would be in ordinary days.

When a more direct approach is used, different tactics are tried. These ads use language that is more explicit, they show the product, make women cut it in half to see what is inside, and use humour in their pictorial metaphors. They tend to be closer to the way women would normally talk with each other about the subject, and try to depict the way women normally feel during that period.

### **Analysing the sanpro ads selected**

This chapter considers one print ad for tampons, and several television ads for sanitary pads. The number of sanitary protection ads that appear on television is considerably larger than the number of sanpro ads in feminine magazines, which is telling of the television ads’ capacity to refer to a taboo product in such a generalist medium without causing widespread embarrassment.

### **Menstrual taboo in magazine ads: o.b. ad**

As we have seen in Chapters Three and Four, magazine and outdoor ads use one of the two channels available to them – image or text – to downplay the taboo implications of their product, while using the other to mention the taboo in an indirect form. The magazine ad chosen to illustrate this section, a Portuguese ad for o.b. tampons, is aimed at teenage girls who are trying tampons for the first time. It recreates a dialogue between two girls, a younger one who still has doubts about using tampons and an older one who tells her about the advantages of using them.

A commercial broadcast on Portuguese television at about the same time also resorts to the same structure of dialogue between an older woman and a teenager, with a humorous approach as a form of escaping offensive readings. A woman in red who knocks unexpectedly on the classroom door is the girl’s first menstruation. This allows for the use of the colour red, which is usually avoided in this kind of ad, where it is usually replaced by blue or green liquid being poured onto sanitary pads (Goddard 1998: 90). The girl translates the term employed by the woman into something more colloquial (*period* instead of *menstruation*), thus alleviating the taboo charge of the concept (Hughes [1991] 1998: 251), denies solemnity to the situation and refuses to show deference to the woman – and to the set of

traditional ideas and clichés the woman represents (Goffman 1967: 58). In this commercial, music plays an important role in the foregrounding of possible taboo moments and reinforces the points where the taboo charge is annulled. Thus, the instruments chosen and the way they are played establish a sort of dialogue with the narrative itself, marking all its turning points and reinforcing its concluding message, making music as important as the images and the words (Blake 1997: 228). The kind of structure found in the teenager commercial brings to mind a story told by music, rather like Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* (1936), the musical piece for children, where every character is identifiable by means of a specific tune. The evocation of the universe of children's tales and subsequent disruption appeals to the age group of this young actress, who will also enjoy her self-sufficiency and independence towards the advice of this mother figure. The victory of the girl over the woman in red confirms the interpretation that approximates the structure of this commercial to that of children's tales (Propp [1969] 1970: 35–80). This final imbalance of relative positions tips the scale very clearly in the girl's favour. She outwits the person who assumed, at first, a position of superior knowledge and experience, thus managing to “jail” the tradition that implies menstruation is a burden. This happens physically, since there is no change whatsoever in the girl's clothes or appearance. It also happens on a psychological level, seeing that the girl shows no distress or embarrassment.

In the o.b. magazine ad (Fig 29), the image depicts the situation in a setting where it might reasonably take place, i.e. the bathroom. This choice of scenery has the dual purpose of allowing the visual introduction of a taboo issue, but also that of providing a feeling of shared intimacy with the viewer. The position occupied by the two girls, in front of the mirror, places the viewers in the role of invisible witnesses to the whole scene, as if they could be hidden behind the mirror and listening in to the dialogue that is taking place.

Two different degrees of indirectness are present in the image and in the text. The former simultaneously foregrounds and downplays taboo, since the only part of this bathroom that is visible is the basin, a rather neutral article in terms of taboo connotations. Visual taboo is also made lighter by the colour scheme used. The squares of different shades of blue in the picture's background match the graphic arrangement of the text and drawing, in the bottom part of the ad. All of these are also encased in blue boxes, echoing the bathroom decoration but also the box of tampons itself.

Apart from encasing taboo and making it more manageable, the layout of the ad mirrors the disposition of the informational content of the ad. The new elements about the tampon are presented in layers of interrelated meanings conveyed under different forms but all converging towards the same goal, as can be exemplified in the following table.

**Table 20.** Interrelated meanings conveyed by different means with the same goal

Picture of the two girls	<div>Different answers to the question: Is it comfortable to wear o.b. when one is using tampons for the first time?</div>
Dialogue between the two girls	
Scientific information about tampons	
Drawing of tampon with its outer layer	
Endline and picture of box of o.b. tampons	

This succession of frames contributes to make taboo safer and more distant from the unintended audience since, in terms of layout and content, the ad progresses from the most indirect element (picture of the two girls) to the most explicit one (photo of o.b. box), making it possible to stop the reading of the ad at the first boxes. At the same time, the intended audience is meant to go on, exploring further the different layers of explanation provided about the product.

This ad exemplifies the way all the elements in an ad can be made to conform to the product’s intended image. The chosen layout allows a neat reading of the product, where taboo issues are carefully packaged and served in small doses to those who need to see it. At the same time, the closed box structure functions as a symbol and reassurance that this taboo will be as private and secretive as the box of tampons itself.

**Menstrual taboo in television ads**

Several ads were chosen to illustrate the different ways taboo can be subsumed or minimised with the help of the technological possibilities offered by television. In these ads, the emphasis is normally placed on the feeling of well-being while the product is worn. That aspect can be visually conveyed and/or textually confirmed. Often, the feeling of happiness is foregrounded by the type of background music chosen. This “enjoyment” brought by the use of the product is usually maximised by one or more of the modes allowed by this channel. Simultaneously, the other modes convey the facts about the product. In the following subsections, some possible forms this oscillation can assume are illustrated with ads taken from Portuguese television during the time span indicated.

### Downplaying of taboo through intertextuality: Renova First ad

The commercial chosen to illustrate this form of downplaying taboo makes the most of the assets provided by the medium it uses to accomplish its aim, i.e. to create an ad that is exciting, adventurous and appealing to young women (without being “girlish”), but also informative and serious, without being boring or – given its subject – openly offensive.

Two ads for sanitary pads shown on Portuguese television at approximately the same time are good examples of the use of rhetorical strategies to minimise the taboo implications of the product to achieve a high degree of indirectness. One of them takes a serious approach to the issue of menstruation, where it has to be kept in absolute secrecy, in such a way that the others cannot tell the difference between a menstruating and a non-menstruating woman. The other ad addresses the issue in a completely delirious and fairy-tale like form, with a marked preference for the depiction of a moment, instead of the suggestion of sameness and invariability by means of visual and verbal repetition that we find in the first one.

In the first commercial, the implicitness is achieved with a synecdoche: “being a woman” represents a related part (menstruation). Menstruation is present as a sort of undercurrent, and its monthly regular appearance is mimicked by the repetitive structure of the ad. On the other hand, the strategy used in the second commercial is one of complete alienation from taboo with a fantasy flight, where a girl is being interviewed, with her story embedded in a larger frame (Toolan 1988: 81), thus allowing for increased subjectivity and distancing from the ‘real’ facts. Although in the English translation the distinction T/V is lost, the option for the most familiar form of address (T) displayed in the original is an open invitation to familiarity. The question-and-answer structure presents some strong points in drawing the viewer further into the world of the commercial. It renders the clause complexity simpler than it would have been if conflated into just one sentence, and it excites the viewer’s curiosity as to what the answer will be (Leech 1966: 112–113). In fact, the answer in this particular case presents a complexity that is comparable to that of an elaborate magazine ad and one which is not commonly found in the more simplified grammatical structures of television commercials (Leech 1966: 118).

The Renova First ad (Fig 30) avoids being excessively girly because of the format that underlies the structure of the ad, which is that of computer games. This electronic environment helps create a safe distance between the universe of the ad and the real world where menstruation happens and where it has to be dealt with.

The scenes depicted in the ad are “clean”, idealised, and the perfect whiteness of the snow in the first scenes matches the immaculate sandy landscape of the ad’s last images. The female character that stars in this computer game-like ad is also at ease in radically different situations. She is active and sporty but enjoys peace and

quiet, as well. This Lara Croft look-alike virtual character named Erika is athletic, sexy, good-looking, perfectly poised, always appropriately dressed and ready to tackle unexpected situations. Another ad from this campaign shows Erika crossing a log bridge in an Amazonian setting (Fig 30a), as a way of exemplifying the hard situations women can find themselves in, and which can be made easier when using this brand of pads.

The ad is structured in three different parts, which articulate according to the logic, language and visuals of computer games. At the same time, they correspond to a strategy of diversion from the issue of menstruation (which might be seen as a physical impairment during certain days of the month) to a focussing on physical accomplishment made possible by a sophisticated prop.

The initial scenes of the ad are full of action and depict the protagonist's skiing proficiency. The dynamism of these scenes is accentuated by the camera shots used, which alternate between long and close shots of Erika's body and face, looking straight at the camera and laughing.

The intermediate scenes, where a strong male voice presents the characteristics of the pads while diagrams of their functioning illustrate what is being said, fulfil a double role. These explanations provide a technological and sophisticated explanation for Erika's grace under pressure in the first scenes and they contribute to reinforce the computer-game atmosphere that characterises the ad. The latter aspect is further confirmed by the slightly metallic tone of the voice- over, by the clipped syntax of his sentences and also by the electronic background music present throughout the ad. In this middle section, the truth-value and scientific quality of what is being said is always corroborated by other means, as if to strip oral speech from any subjectivity. The male speaker's concluding words when describing each of the pad's characteristics also appear written on the screen, while the images allow the viewer to visualise the whole process in a schematic form, rather in the same way a scientist would explain a new discovery to an audience or a major computer company might present its new computer game product to a knowledgeable public.

The opening gambit and the middle section stress impersonality and self-sufficiency supported by technological mediation. This emphasis on the pad – the mediating prop – diverts attention from the reason why it is necessary to use it. It is as if this ideal woman character has managed to master tiresome physical constraints and moved on towards a perfect relationship with her body and surrounding environment. By using this pad, her menstrual period has become natural (i.e. integrated in her normal life) with the help of science (Williamson 1978: 103).

Just like Erika, this pad is brisk, sleek, clean and matter-of-fact. Both Erika and the pad are shown as technological mediators that contribute to making a natural process even easier to live with, in their role of double filters. Erika functions as a

feminine prototype, who symbolises women at their best, whereas the pad shown in this ad is so aseptically decomposed or translated into its most minute components that we lose sight of its existence as a concrete and palpable object. It becomes as virtual a presence in this universe as Erika herself. The gap between this prototype pad and this prototype woman and their real counterparts must be bridged by the (women) viewers, who will supply the understated (and unpleasant) elements.

To counterbalance the presence of technology in the intermediate scene, the third part of the ad shows Erika in a different type of communion with Nature. Unlike what happens in the opening scenes, she is now calm and relaxed, as much a part of this unspoilt setting as the bird perched on her knee. This change of scenery also has a symbolic function, in that it stands for all the situations women might find themselves in, which might be potentially awkward and that are made safe and pleasant because this brand of pad is being used. In this last scene, the sense of conclusion is reinforced by the circularity of the camera movement around Erika. It foregrounds the sense of circularity in the ad, but also the completeness of the pad in terms of total protection.

This ad represents an exercise in narcissism where the action is centred on one woman's evident self-sufficiency. When Erika looks straight into the camera, in the initial scenes and then again in the last scene, she is implicitly winking at the women viewers and saying, "This is how I do it", with the explanation being encased in the middle scenes. Excessive intimacy and girlish connotations are here avoided by the fact that Erika does not feature in the intermediate scenes, i.e. she does not handle the pad. As we have seen, this pad is totally translated into an electronic device, with no concrete existence, which almost annuls its connection to a physical taboo. Another important distancing factor is that a male voice is used to talk about the pad and not a female one, with carefully chosen sentences that never mention its purpose. Thus, the part of the ad that could present taboo implications is rendered even more neutral. When a female voice-over is finally used, by the end of the ad, the threat of taboo has already been dealt with.

This strategy of depicting total self-sufficiency contrasts with approaches that can be observed in other sanpro ads, where the women who do not use the specific brand being advertised are explicitly shown, looking at the woman who already uses it in admiration or envy. This admiring look could also come from men, as happens in some ads. In the case of the Carefree Respirare "hothouse" ad (Fig 33), analysed below, the two women standing by observe the happy expression on the other woman's face and comment on it.



Downplaying taboo through visuals and music: Carefree Black

This ad for a daily mini pad (Fig 31) also represents self-sufficiency, but with an increased emphasis on the need for secrecy that normally surrounds menstruation and vaginal secretions. It presents a visual and verbal play around the opposing concepts of hidden/revealed and black/white. Whereas in the Renova First ad, taboo is almost entirely sidestepped, this ad openly admits the existence of a secret that women want to keep. The ad takes for granted that menstrual matters are embarrassing both for women and for men. This is why black pads are needed to wear with black lingerie, so that secrecy can be maintained at all costs. The word “secret”, used twice in the same sentence, draws our attention to this semantic field, which had already been visually introduced by the peeping camera movement through the keyhole: Now, one of the best kept of women’s **secrets** will remain a **secret**. The use of the plural form (secrets) in the middle of the sentence is narrowed down to its single form (secret) by the end, which points to the singling out of menstrual issues as one of the last taboos, one that women want to maintain. When placed at the beginning of the sentence, the word “now” would normally suggest an alteration to a previous state. In ads, this altered state usually occurs thanks to the use of the product advertised. In this case, our expectations are thwarted because of the “will remain”. What this product promises is not an alteration of the status quo but the immutability of something that already exists. As we can see in the following diagrams, this ad subverts the expectations created at a linguistic level. Usually, such a sentence in an ad would be enchainned in the following manner:

Table 21. Normal linguistic structure of the advertising promise

NOW,	⇒	<i>a given situation</i>	⇒	will	➤ <i>become better</i>	} with Brand X.
					➤ <i>be different</i>	
					➤ <i>be improved</i>	

The Carefree Black ad plays with our ad reading schema by twisting the expected enchainment after the element “will”:

Table 22. Subversion of reading schema of the advertising promise

NOW,	⇒	<i>a given situation</i>	⇒	will	⇒ <i>remain the same with Carefree Black.</i>
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This deviation from the usual sales pitch of this type of advertisement parallels the deviation the product itself represents, when compared with the standard products.

This daily pad is black, whereas, traditionally, pads are snowy white, i.e., connoted with purity and cleanliness, which in itself might be a way of sidestepping the colour red implicit in the menstrual taboo. Literally, these mini-pads keep this ultimate secret in the dark, hidden and invisible even with black clothes, and keep it locked behind closed doors, as an added resource of female mystery and seduction.

This ad presents an almost delirious tone, accentuated by the type of music that accompanies the scenes. The Carefree Black ad conveys a generalised sense of rhythm and decentralisation of points of view. It is as if, in different female voices discernible in the song, several opinions were being taken into account, and everyone was contributing to the making of the commercial – viewer included. In the present case, all these voices seem to concur in the same direction, making it a false case of heteroglossia. The apparent diversity of voices corresponds, in fact, to a monologic discourse divided among several speakers (Cook 1992: 184). As we have seen, all the elements in the ad agree in the presupposition, “menstruation must be kept secret” and none of the media used conveys a different message. This confirms the ad’s centripetal movement towards the notion of “secrecy” and “negative” (as in the negative of a photo, where the light elements appear as dark).

In this ad, we have a visual part that corresponds to the definition of “narcissistic ads” (González Requena and Ortiz de Zárate 1995: 42; Arconada 1997: 48). The succession of rotating scenes does not convey information nor does it contribute to a narrative-like progression that is present in many ads. Therefore, the focus of attention is centred on the image itself – the woman getting dressed, and on its seductive possibilities, heightened by the wearing of a black liner with black lingerie:

[W]hen we talk about seductive enunciation, it must be said that this type of enunciation that does neither correspond (...) to an informative function (...) nor to a rhetorical one (...), but rather to a phatic function that accentuates to a paroxysm the communicative contact between the ‘I’ and the ‘You’. In this contact, they are no longer differentiated entities. Quite the opposite: they are fused. (González Requena and Ortiz de Zárate 1995: 23, my translation)

Taboo is downplayed by this use of image, where the woman/actress and the woman viewer/voyeur share this dimension of intimacy and become accomplices in this strategy of seduction. This process of fusion is finally accomplished when the woman/actress prepares to leave the room, looking straight at the camera and smiling mysteriously. The facts – which are necessary to understand what the scenes are about – are conveyed by the spoken text, the endline of the ad and the half-hidden box of mini-pads. These elements provide the thread that unifies and makes sense of the ad. In this way, we see that the new element that every ad promises is, in this case, a token of immutability. This black pad has become part of the

lingerie itself, and after this woman has passed her bedroom door, nobody will know for sure whether she is wearing it.

### **Downplaying taboo with pictorial metaphors: Carefree Respirare “hothouse” and Carefree Respirare “cheeks”**

The two commercials chosen to illustrate this section are part of the same campaign. Both are structured around a series of pictorial metaphors, which, in turn, are explained and supported by a verbal metaphor. This strategy of *deviation* is a common one among commercials for sanitary pads and tampons that need to avoid mentioning the menstruation taboo, as we have seen. However, it is interesting to note that the product advertised – mini daily sanitary pads – is meant to be used in-between menstrual periods, and not during them. In fact, its function is to be a shield for panties, whose function is already that of shielding outer clothes from occasional secretions. If we analyse the issue from this point of view, we can conclude that this product does not really correspond to a taboo issue. However, it succeeds in extending the menstruation taboo to every single day of the month. This approximation between “normal” days and menstruating days is, thus, a form of justifying the need for daily pads, and it is confirmed by the similar approaches used in commercials for pads and in commercials for mini-pads.

In the case of these commercials, which present the same type of structure and narrative development, we can see several pictorial metaphors that are employed as substitutes for different concepts grouped around a larger concept of “lack of freshness” or “freshness”. Thus, in the first ad, “hothouse” (Fig 32), we have SWEATY WHITE BLOUSE IS SWEATY DAILY PAD, DRAWING ON WINDOW PANE IS SWEATY DAILY PAD as metaphors for the lack of freshness which is a characteristic of all the other brands. All these metaphors are possible with help of the explanations provided by the young woman herself, which allows us to identify the metaphor’s absent term – the daily pad.

This same idea is retrieved in the second ad, “cheeks” (Fig 33), with a more comprehensive type of pictorial metaphor, which manages to suggest difficulty in breathing, lack of freshness and discomfort. Whereas in the hothouse ad, the pictorial metaphors were being successively layered up, in the “cheeks” ad, a part of the women’s body – the mouth – was used to represent the full effect of the “normal” daily pads. Therefore, in the second ad, we have BLOWN CHEEKS ARE GENERAL FEELING OF DISCOMFORT WHILE WEARING PADS. The increased density of the “cheeks” metaphor allows this second ad to reduce the number of explanations necessary for it to be interpreted. Possibly, the fact that this second ad is establishing a parallelism between two parts of the body (and not

between a part of the body and a building) also makes it easier to look at the metaphor in more sensory and immediate terms. Therefore, the verbal comments can be centred around the issue of *breathing* and *not breathing*.

To illustrate the concept of *freshness* associated with this specific brand, both ads use the same pictorial metaphor, namely PORES ON DAILY PAD ARE OPEN WINDOWS WITH FLOWING CURTAINS. In the first ad, LEAVING THE HOTHOUSE IS CHANGING THE BRAND. In the second ad, the smiling blonde woman herself represents the change of brand. Both ads resort to metaphors connected with nature to illustrate the result of the change of brand. In the “hothouse” ad, THE SEA IS COOLNESS AND FRESHNESS. In the “cheeks” ad, the wind fulfils this role.

While it is obvious that some of these pictorial metaphors only make full sense retrospectively or on a second viewing of these commercials, it is certain that they are intended for their cumulative effect. In the hothouse ad, the viewer – just like the young woman – is visually surrounded by symbols of heat and humidity. Then, the establishment of a parallelism between the situation in the hothouse and the female body (“The same used to happen with my body...”) emphasizes this visual evidence. It also sums up verbally all the information that is being transmitted visually.

In the “hothouse” ad, the transition between the previous state of non-freshness and a state of perfect freshness is established by the sudden appearance of the box of pads, that effectively separates the commercial into two different blocks, a *before* and an *after*. There is also a notion that is accessory to that of freshness and which appears as an added value to the present brand. The pictorial metaphors on the side of the *before* are artificial and man-made. They present side effects that come from trying to reproduce the natural ways. On the other hand, the pictorial metaphors on the *after* block are the wind and the water in their pristine state they have not been tampered with by man, so they are in harmony with the body. Thus, in both ads, the concept of naturalness is associated with the initial concept of freshness.

The omission of the clear purpose of the product is also an indication of the presence of a taboo, and reliance on shared knowledge on the part of the viewers. This effect is also accentuated by the use of the diminutive in Portuguese versions of these ads. The word *pensinho* in the Portuguese original corresponds to the radical *penso* (in English, *pad*) plus the suffix *-inho* (which would, in English, correspond roughly to the idea of *mini* or *small*). However, in the Portuguese original, this suffix conveys more than just an indication of size. In the present context, it helps (1) to place the product in the universe of feminine interests, since objects meant for women or children often present this suffixation. It also (2) reveals a sort of affectionate feeling of the user towards the object thus designated, and (3) points out to the existence of a previous familiarity with the product, since this suffix is often added to the names of well-known things and persons.

As we can see from the analysis of the commercials, the taboo charge is diluted and almost neutralised by the filtering effect of several pictorial metaphors. In fact, the only one that really resembles the product advertised is the iconic drawing on the windowpane, which reproduces the outer shape of the pad. It is interesting to note that this shape, as it is drawn, is the same for daily pads and for sanitary pads used during menstrual periods, which contributes to the already mentioned process of assimilation of “normal” days by menstruation days and to the dissemination of the corresponding taboo.

Therefore, this commercial manages to advertise its product as something necessary based on a “neighbouring” taboo that demands special artefacts to deal with. We can say that the product (1) is parasitical on the taboo charge associated with menstruation pads, (2) parasitically borrows the means associated with that taboo and (3) also stresses that parasitical relationship verbally by attributing to this product the same name: pads.

**Summing-up: downplaying taboo with pictorial metaphors, proto-narrative, narcissistic format, external counselling: o.b. Comfort**

This last point is illustrated by a television ad for o.b. Comfort tampons (Fig 34). It was chosen because it simultaneously displays a number of strategies that have already appeared in the previous analyses. All of these strategies combined contribute to distract the focus of attention from the menstrual taboo in a complex and effective way.

The use of successive pictorial metaphors in this ad fulfils an ingenious double role. On the one hand, it provides a creative form of replacing explicit depictions of tampons and pads being put in place or worn (a step that usually remains in a sort of limbo in all sanpro ads). On the other hand, it punctuates the development of the narrative sequence, in which it is aided by the voice-off’s words and strategically placed pauses.

The three pictorial metaphors in this ad mark three different possibilities in terms of menstrual protection or rather, they transform the two that effectively exist (pads and tampons) into three: pads, tampons and o.b. Comfort. All these metaphors are based on an approximation between the external and the internal parts of the body. As in the Carefree “cheeks” ad, the primary and secondary terms of the pictorial metaphor are located in the body.

In this ad, the comfort or discomfort felt outside signifies the corresponding inner sensations (Cintra Torres 2006: 54). Underlying all these metaphors is the notion that, to be comfortable, clothes should not be felt at all. Therefore, the ones

that are too much of a burden for this young woman are to be put aside, just like menstrual protections that make their presence evident.

The understanding of the first visual metaphor as BLUE JUMPER IS ILL-FITTING TAMPON is aided by the explanations given by the voice-over, which help set the images in context – in a more explicit form than usual, with the mention of the word “period”. In this way, the viewer is taught to interpret all the outfits the young woman is trying on as different forms of menstrual protection and judge on their adequacy (or lack of it) according to the way they fit her. In the second metaphor, the only explanation necessary has to do with the kind of protection being evaluated: pads. Their inadequacy for this young woman is evident, when we see that LONG, THICK, WOOLLY TURTLENECK JUMPER IS PAD, in the universe of this ad. The only protection that fits perfectly is the one that can be translated as SILK DRESS IS o.b. COMFORT, the last visual metaphor of the series.

These pictorial metaphors provide an economical and efficient form of associating positive or negative sensorial qualities to the protective artefacts that are being compared here – much more so than if they were only being verbally referred to or even shown, since a physical feeling is being associated with another physical feeling. In the first two pictorial metaphors, the transference of qualities from the first onto the second domain foregrounds the negative characteristics of the elements compared:

**Table 23.** Comparing the transference of negative characteristics in pictorial metaphors

BLUE SWEATER = NORMAL TAMPON	
Too tight -----	Too large
Too thick -----	Too large and thick
Hard to pass through the head -----	Hard to insert (and remove)
Makes arm movements difficult -----	Movement can cause internal pain
WHITE JUMPER = PAD	
Too long -----	Too long
Too thick -----	Too thick / bulging
Too warm -----	Too stuffy
Old-fashioned? -----	Appropriate to older women?
White? -----	Too obvious with some underwear?

As we can see from the above table, the similarity between first and second domain is higher in the case of the pad and presents a sort of mirror effect in the case of the tampons (tight/large, difficult arm movements/internal pain). This is easily

explained if we think that, like clothes, pads are meant to be worn externally, whereas tampons are worn inside the body.

The last pictorial metaphor, connected as it is with the product advertised, highlights the positive aspects of this particular brand of tampon, in contrast with the other two products. The transference of positive characteristics from the first to the second domain must therefore be made even more evident than in the two previous metaphors. The similarity between the silky feeling of this brand of tampons and real silk is hinted at even before the clothes metaphor is introduced, with a box of o.b. appearing in the opening underwear drawer.

After the metaphor of the silk dress is explored (with a long and descending camera movement down the young woman's body), it is further emphasized by an ingenious reversed effect metaphor. In the visuals that explain the functioning of the tampon's silk layer, it is now the layer with *Silk-Touch* written on that detaches itself from the box and wraps around the tampon in a dress-like manner. Thus, once again, the play on the opposition/similarity of the external and internal dimensions stresses the symbiotic relationship of the tampon with the body, with an overlapping of positive associations, as the following table demonstrates:

**Table 24.** An internal / external overlapping of associations in a pictorial metaphor

SILK DRESS = o.b. COMFORT TAMPON	
Easy to put on, 'glides' on the skin -----	Easy to insert (and remove)
Moving, flowing -----	Fast moving, not painful to insert
Allows movement -----	Does not make movement painful
Pleasant to the touch -----	Pleasant to the touch
Comfortable to the (outer) skin -----	Comfortable to the (inner) skin
Cool, fresh fabric -----	Comfortable and fresh to the inner skin
Sleek, stylish, simple -----	Sleek and streamlined
Fashionable -----	Modern, fit to be used by younger women

One of the strategies used in this ad, external counselling, has already been analysed in the o.b. magazine ad. In this case, it presents a slight variation. The role of the more experienced girlfriend is now played by the voice-over, where a female deep-toned voice of a woman in her mid-thirties analyses the different options, discards pads as a suitable options, explains why o.b. Comfort is so much better than the other tampons and advises young women to wear this brand more often. The advantages of o.b. Comfort and the drawbacks of other tampons (o.b.'s main competitor products) are clearly explained, whereas in the case of pads (o.b.'s secondary competition), it is mainly the visual metaphor and the voice-over's slightly ironical inflexion in the sentence "Or you can wear pads..." and subsequent pause

that establish the inadequacy of this form of menstrual protection. Implicitly, this voice-over is saying: “See how you’ll look if you use them.”

There is a further layer to this counselling voice, which has to do with masculine approval. This role is played by the young woman’s boyfriend, who shakes his head or nods, according to the outfits she is trying on. His presence and interaction with the young woman allows the possibility of a proto-narrative format in this ad, which helps the construing of a PREPARING TO GO OUT WITH BOYFRIEND schema. This is an effective form of conflating the very familiar situation (for women, at least) of having to decide on the best outfit to wear on a date and the need to choose a form of menstrual protection that makes it virtually invisible to men’s eyes. This ideal protection guarantees – as in this ad – masculine approval, which derives directly from a holistic perspective of internal and external well-being.

As we have seen in this ad, the premise that inner comfort is indispensable to outward beauty allows the mitigation of the menstrual taboo by the replacement of the taboo-related elements (the genital parts) by a non-taboo area, i.e. the exterior part of the body. The accentuation of its aesthetic component, with the repeated display of the young woman’s more or less naked body and the stressing of her elegance in a silk dress annul the taboo, up to a point, by resorting to a carefully measured and tamed sensuality. All the strategies used in this ad point to one direction: this brand of tampon will fit you as perfectly as a good dress will.

## Conclusion

From the analyses presented above, it is possible to confirm that most ads for sanpro products present a more complex combination of rhetorical strategies than the ones found in the previous chapters. This is due, as we have seen, to the fact that these types of ad always have a serious and embarrassing taboo to deal with, unlike what happens with some ads studied before. In some of these, it was merely necessary to downplay taboo through one channel. That was the case of the commercial for Skip (Fig 18), where the taboo was mainly minimised by visual means. All the ads selected to illustrate this chapter hide the taboo through the cumulative effect of tactics also used in the ads studied previously. The o.b. Comfort ads (both in the magazine and television versions, Figs 30 and 35), employ a visual simplification when it comes to presenting the tampon and its functioning that is comparable to the stylisation found in the Canesten magazine ad (Fig 1). The combination of both tactics conveys the overall feeling of indirectness that helps reduce the taboo content.

The television commercials for Impulse (Fig 24) and Renova First (Figs 31 and 31a) both present a high degree of visual and textual indirectness that is not matched by any of the ads in Chapter Five. The approach used in the latter can be



seen as an extreme version of the Harpic ad (Fig 21), which also departs from reality and merely keeps a loose connection with the product advertised.

The developing pictorial metaphors of the o.b. Comfort television commercial are a more extreme and original version of the “personification” used in the ad for Abraço (Fig 23). However, its use of music and sound effects as a form of punctuating the narrative is more approximate to the one displayed in the Martini ad (Fig 29).

The commercial for o.b. Comfort presents an extraordinary number of rhetorical strategies reunited in the same ad. It uses an implicit question-answer structure to avoid imposition and to make the viewer a part of the dialogue that is comparable to the way the Fibre 1 ad (Fig 22) works. It also resorts to a narrative format that allows for demonstration of the product, as happens in the Scottex ad (Fig 19).

The combination of so many strategies in each of these ads indicates the special sensitivity associated with the issue of menstruation, i.e. bleeding and associated body smells. As we have seen, it could tentatively be said that pretending that menstruation does not exist is a form of denying women the possibility of seeing themselves as a whole entity. In fact, on the face of the evidence provided by the ads analysed in this chapter and many similar ones that are broadcast everyday, it is possible to conclude that menstruation and the mere reference to it is highly undesirable and the need to deal with it must be safeguarded with a number of protective devices – like the bleeding itself.

Apart from the possibility of analysing different taboo-disguising strategies at use in the same ad, these ads for sanitary products also represent a form of demonstrating the strong presence of taboo in daily life and the need to deal with it even in ads that are broadcast so often that they almost go unnoticed.

TRANSCRIPTION	AD DESCRIPTION
Dialogue: 'But is it really that easy?' 'Trust me... and o.b. tampons were even designed by a woman gynaecologist!'	Top half page: MS of two young women in the bathroom, in front of the washing basin. One of them, who looks slightly older, is holding a box of o.b. tampons, while the other is looking at her a bit doubtfully.
Tampon drawing: Silk Touch: easier to insert	Bottom half page: Against a blue background, the dialogue lines appear in larger white lettering. Next to the text is a small box with the drawing of a tampon, explaining the use of the Silk Touch layer.
Text: With o.b. Comfort you don't have to worry when you try tampons. o.b. Comfort has a unique Silk Touch covering, as soft as silk, and a thin, anatomical shape, ideal for making insertion and removal easier, even when you're using them for the first time. That is why more and more girls recommend o.b. to their girlfriends. With o.b. Comfort, it's easy to feel really protected. o.b.: more comfortable than ever. If you have any question, contact us on ----- or access -----.	Text appears against a lighter blue background, in smaller white lettering. Endline and contact details appear in blue lettering against an even lighter shade of blue, with superimposed photo of o.b. tampon box next to the text.

Figure 29. o.b. ad (tampons)



Figure 30a. Renova First commercial (sanitary pads)




Visuals (actions and written words)	Spoken words	Music	Key frames
Young Woman (Erika) skiing down the snowy slopes. LS of mountain scenes alternating with CS of Erika. (Laughter). CS of rotating sanitary pad, showing the effect of polymers, against a background of musical level meters.		Technological, lively music.	
Written words: 'Polymers with high absorption capacity. Maximal protection.'	(Male voice): 'Polymers with high absorption capacity. Maximal protection.'		'...clinically-tested materials.'
CS of rotating sanitary pad showing the functioning of alveolar surface.			
Written words: 'Alveolar surface with new technology. Freshness and purity.'	(Male voice): 'Alveolar surface with new technology.'		'Dermatologically safe.'
Little 'bullets' of different colours cross the screen continuously while the pad rotates. Rows of letters stream continuously into the pad.	Freshness and purity.'		
LS of deserted beach, approaching to rotating CS of Erika sitting on a rock and looking at a bird perched on her knee.	(Male voice): 'Selected and clinically-tested materials. Dermatologically safe.'		
Written words: 'Dermatologically safe.'	(Erika's voice): 'First'	Arpeggio-like resolution	
CS of Erika's face	(female voice): 'First.		
Image of packs of Renova First	By Renova. Well-being effect. By Renova'		'First'
Round logo: 'Renova: freshness and purity' 'Purity effect'			

Figure 30. Renova First commercial (sanitary pads)

Visuals (actions and written words)	Spoken words	Music
<p>The camera moves through a key hole into a bedroom in a swift movement. A young woman is getting dressed. She has black underwear and picks up a black dress that is lying on the bed. Under it is a pack of Carefree Black mini daily pads.</p> <p>After putting the black dress on, the young woman walks towards the camera.</p> <p>Camera makes the opposite movement and retreats from the room through the keyhole. A black pad is gradually superimposed on the keyhole.</p> <p>Cut to image of black pad next to box of pads against a background of white silk with the written words:</p> <p><i>Written text</i> 'New Carefree black. As invisible as freshness.'</p>	<p>(<i>female voice-over</i>) Now, one of the best kept of women's secrets will remain a secret.</p> <p>New Carefree Black. As invisible as freshness.</p>	<p>Modern, multi-vocal tune. Different female voices discernible.</p>

Figure 31. Carefree Black commercial (daily pads)



Visuals (actions and written words)	Spoken words	Music
MCS of Women walking in the street with their cheeks blown, full of air. CS of hand taking a pad from a box of Carefree pads. CS of an open window with white curtains blowing in the wind. Camera moves away from the window and a series of similar windows form the pores of the pad. CS of a Blonde Woman putting on and adjusting her white underwear.	<i>Voice-over (female):</i>  Many women still spend many hours without breathing. That's because they don't wear Carefree.	Female voice, lively tune.
Blonde Woman walking in the street with a smile on her face, while other women with blown cheeks turn around to look at her.	The only daily mini pad that lets your skin breathe.  So that you feel fresher and more comfortable.	
Blonde Woman at the window, with the wind blowing on her face and air.  MCS of Carefree boxes. Superimposed on the top right corner of the image: 'NEW'.	New Carefree Respirare: the only daily mini pad that lets your skin breathe.	

Figure 33. Carefree Respirare 'cheeks' (daily mini pads)

Visuals (actions and written words)	Spoken words	Music
MCS of Young Woman in her bedroom, in front of the mirror, wearing white underwear. She tries on a heavy blue woollen sweater. It is too tight for her. CS of her boyfriend's face, looking at her. She takes the sweater off. She tries on a longish thick white woollen turtleneck jumper. It's too long for her. CS of boyfriend's face, shaking his head. She takes the sweater off and throws it at her boyfriend. CS of Young Woman opening drawer. A box of o.b. tampons is lying among silk clothes and underwear. Word on top right corner: 'NEW'. She fondles one of the pieces of clothing. MS of Young Woman putting on a very simple greyish silk dress. XCS downward camera movement: it fits her perfectly. CS of boyfriend's face, smiling in approval. Cut to box of o.b. Silk Touch. Top left part of the box with 'Silk Touch' written on it detaches itself and flies in a dress-like manner to cover a tampon. Cut to a diagram of two tampons moving along two grooves, comparing ob's performance with another tampon's: o.b. slides faster. Cut to Young Woman and her boyfriend. She runs to him and sits on his lap. CS of couple embracing, smiling at each other.	<i>Voice-over (female).</i> When you're having your period, you can wear tampons, but sometimes you may find them hard to insert.  Or you can wear pads.          Now you can try the new o.b. Comfort, the most comfortable tampons to insert and remove.   With its new exclusive 'Silk Touch' layering cover, as smooth as silk, ob Comfort has never been easier to insert and remove.  o.b. Comfort. Wear tampons more often, so that you feel really confident.	Light funky music, with rhythmic chorus of female voices.                      Intensity of the chorus and complexity of the tune increases
Superimposed on the image, bottom left corner: box of o.b. Written words: 'New o.b. Comfort with Silk Touch layer'	New ob Comfort: the most comfortable protection ever.	

Figure 34. o.b. Comfort commercial (tampons)





## Conclusion

This book about taboo ads with non-taboo approaches and non-taboo ads that choose to have taboo readings has drawn on three major fields. As we have seen, it has referred to theories about taboo (which were essential to establish the working definition of taboo supporting the choice of ads to be analysed), to theories and insights on advertising (that contributed to the understanding of the contemporary ads chosen and provided models for the different readings), and concepts from stylistic analysis (which furnished the fundamental tools for the analyses of the ads selected).

As evidenced in Chapter 1, there exists a huge amount of literature by major thinkers on the issue of taboo, analysed from several different perspectives. One of the purposes of this book was to review some of the most renowned works in this area until a perspective was found (Steiner's and Douglas's) that confirmed the notion underpinning all the analyses made here: that taboo is present in everyday life and people today are still cautious when treading on issues that are usually considered dangerous. In the works of thinkers such as Robertson-Smith, Frazer, and, to a lesser extent, Lévy-Bruhl, taboo is presented as something obscure and primitive that forbade certain actions in a more or less arbitrary manner. The fact that it existed in certain "primitive" societies constituted added proof of the backwardness of members of such societies. The corollary of this notion would be that white people were superior, firstly because they could retrace the form primitive thought had evolved, and secondly because, among the whites, only the "purer" and more spiritual types of taboo had survived. Thus, these authors laid the basis of a notion that still lingers in contemporary thinking. One still feels, nowadays, that *taboo* is a ponderous and serious matter, due to its connection with the sacred. As to the immediate repulsion felt when facing bodily excretion, dirt and bodily smells, it is commonly attributed to a culturally enforced respect for hygiene and fear of health-threatening bacteria. In the same manner, fascination for sex is seen as a transgression of the established values of society. Nowadays, it has even come to be seen as gambling with death due to the number of sexually transmitted diseases. Authors such as Van Gennep, Freud, Steiner, and Douglas exposed this fear of dirt, sex and related issues experienced in contemporary society as something a lot less rational than explanations such as the ones above might suggest. The spheres of the bodily and the spiritual have always been connected. When we impose divi-

sions and classifications and chase dirt from our material belongings, it is in an effort to maintain order in society and in the cosmos that we feel is the correct one. Whatever is out of place is a threat to the status quo, and that is why we strive to have a proper place for everything – in our bodies, in our houses, in society and in the universe.

The analyses undertaken in this book demonstrate the existence of taboos mainly in three areas, which are interrelated: (a) when there are doubts about the clear categorisation of the individual, (b) in cases of defilement and pollution, and (3) whenever the social status quo is menaced. However, reactions to taboo are complex. Nowadays, taboo issues concerned with pollution suffer a sort of invisibility that causes them to be seen as mere straightforward matters of physical dirtiness, which can be dealt with simply and effectively using the array of cleaning products daily advertised in every medium. This apparent simplicity is reinforced by the way these products are presented in ads. However, a detailed analysis of these ads – like the one undertaken here – reveals something of the complex role taboos still have in contemporary Western society. The fact that they are disguised, enhanced, and often deliberately flaunted is a definite proof of their existence.

The validity of such assertions can be confirmed when we analyse a type of discourse that permeates every aspect of social life in the western world. Advertising is present everywhere, and it mimics social relationships of every kind. Ads for products that help to hide or eliminate what is out of order are extremely common in every medium, and they are generally seen as being uncomplicated, both in the type of artistic approach presented and in the type of products they advertise. In ads for other products that do not present taboo implications, references to sex are often disguised under more obviously artistic and ingenious forms. This fact makes them more visible than the taboo ads that have to disguise taboo content. This book argues that taboo ads are by no means as simple as they might appear at a cursory glance. Neither are the products they advertise as straightforward and banal as they are usually thought to be. If they appear so ordinary, irrelevant and matter-of-fact, it is because the final aim of the advertiser has been achieved and the taboo has been successfully hidden away in a sort of comfortable invisibility. In fact, when we look at these ads more closely, it is possible to see either a number of complex strategies that interact to make the product appear simple and non-taboo, or ingenious tactics that add a very carefully controlled sheen of taboo to a product that has none or needs not have it. Faced with the taboo-disguising strategies we have discussed in the previous chapters, it would seem paradoxical to try to associate taboo readings to a taboo-free product or service. However, the fact that it happens – and, very often, with sex – corroborates the idea that taboos still evoke strong and contradictory emotions, and that ads know how to play with them to their advantage. Sex is a taboo that allows this type of play, since it arouses

a more or less veiled interest in the generality of the viewers. The fact that “sex sells” is widely acknowledged by advertisers and knowledgeable publics, which explains the fact that it can be used – in carefully controlled doses – as an advertising strategy in itself.

Ads for taboo products and ads that deliberately transform their products into taboo usually reinforce the reductive way taboos are generally understood in contemporary society. Ads are concerned with products, i.e. with goods that can be beautified, wished for, sold, and bought. They are aimed at what is material, palpable and tangible.

However, as we have seen in Chapter 1, in their original sense, taboo concepts were related with the physical and with the metaphysical aspects of human life. They constituted warning signs to the presence of danger. Any situation that implied a threat to the wholeness of the individual – and, consequently, to the surrounding society and the rest of the universe – would be singled out and isolated. In modern consumer culture, these potentially dangerous situations are dealt with in terms of practical, commonplace solutions for simple problems. If the bathroom is dirty, it can easily be cleaned with the right product; if the body is sweaty and smelly, a good deodorant will annul those side effects of a day’s work; if a woman is menstruating, an effective sanitary pad or tampon will allow her to pretend (to others and to herself) that nothing is happening. Other potentially dangerous situations are sometimes employed to give added edge to products that have nothing dangerous about them. An expensive car or a given brand of perfume are often marketed in terms of increased sexual attraction for the people who buy them; clothes and film producers can acquire a connotation of irreverence and raciness when they make use of bad language in the copy of their ads.

By focussing on the taboos that ads try to hide or, conversely, foreground, this analysis goes beyond the traditional perspectives on advertising considered as a creator of desires and as a more or less effective incentive to purchasing decisions. Apart from the factual information they present – which is often the least part of it – ads convey important messages as to the way people view their roles in society. Since they are such an omnipresent type of discourse today, it is likely that they also influence the way we see products as commodities that can solve many problems and difficulties we face in everyday life. Ads present products that help us deal with taboos of repulsion, risk and protection – and, in the strategies they use to play with them, they constitute apt symbols of the roundabout tactics we have to resort to when facing them in various social interactions.

A large part of the meaning in contemporary advertising is preferably conveyed by channels other than the linguistic, which demands a multimodal type of stylistic analysis. This is especially true of taboo ads, which commonly choose to convey the most complicated part of their message through the channels that are

less likely to be challenged in terms of logical arguments. However, what is an advantage for the advertiser becomes a drawback to the researcher wishing to give equal importance to all the channels in order to avoid an unbalanced and deformed analysis. In fact, taboo ads rely heavily on sound and visual materials, and an analysis of taboo such as this work would be greatly impaired if it failed to take them into consideration. Albeit in a more or less tentative and subjective form – since there is still an evident lack of theorisation about the conveyance of meaning through these modes – this book studies this complex interaction of meanings as they appear disseminated through text and image (in magazine and outdoor ads), or through text and speech, moving images, music and sounds (in television commercials). Apart from its other aims, it can also be seen as a contribution to this type of global analysis that contemporary ads demand. It can also be seen as a proof of the need for further advance in the establishment of a grammar for modes that are assuming such a preponderant role in contemporary advertising.

In the three chapters dedicated to the analysis of ads, taboo ads with non-taboo approaches were separated from non-taboo ads with taboo approaches. Even if both employ the same methods, they use them for entirely different purposes. Therefore, products with an inherent taboo connotation try to efface it by diverting the viewer's attention to more pleasant issues. When the taboo reference is made through one channel, the more light-hearted part of the message is conveyed by another. In magazine ads, this is usually achieved by means of pictorial metaphors (Canesten ad), euphemism and textual indirectness (Lactacyd ad), juxtaposition of textual and visual indirectness (Sloggi ad).

To associate a sexual connotation with non-taboo magazine and outdoor ads, the strategies used were those of suggestiveness, i.e. with pictorial metaphors (Total Recall ad), or intertextuality and parody (CECE ad and the Super Bock ads from Chapter 4).

In television ads for taboo products, the same resources were found, but often in combination with music and intertextuality (Harpic), voice intonation and sound effects (Fibre 1 and Combi Danone ads), and moving images that allow the development of pictorial metaphors (Impulse ad), and the establishment of more explicit narrative sequences (Colhogar and Scottex ads).

When the intention of the advertiser is to make the product look more appealing to a given target audience, tactics are used in reverse. Intertextuality and humour become a reflection about the functioning of the advertising seduction, when an enticing woman in black appears as a pictorial metaphor for sex and near death (Martini ad).

A special case in Chapters 3 and 5 was that of non-commercial ads, which differ from most of the others in having both a taboo "product" to present and deliberately choosing a taboo approach to do so. Ads for issues like AIDS, or campaigns

against smoking and drink driving are granted a special license to shock. To achieve a truly disturbing effect, the non-commercial ads selected to illustrate their category used the tactics mentioned above to obtain maximum effect. These were a disturbing pictorial metaphor combined with black and white images and suggestive music (Abraço ad), and a repulsive double pictorial metaphor conflated with an ingenious parody of other ads (the ad for the Quitline Health Education Authority anti-smoking campaign).

Resources such as pictorial metaphors, textual indirectness, inferences obtained from slogan and endline, juxtaposition of word and image, euphemism, intertextuality, parody, and suggestive music are not exclusive to taboo ads, but they are given special uses by them. Usually, the difference between them and other ads with no taboo implications lies in the way the different resources are skilfully combined in order to achieve an overall effect of safe reference to taboo, which is a precaution the majority of ads for other products do not need to take. The major difference found in the devices used by magazine and television ads was the further complexity assumed by the latter, since several strategies already present in the former can be given development over time and space in a medium such as television.

Chapter 6, intended as a summary of the strategies explored in the two previous chapters, demonstrated that the more embarrassing the taboo issue, the more complex the strategies to hide it will be. What we saw in this chapter dedicated to the analysis of ads for sanitary products was that they often conflated many of the previous strategies in order to disseminate the taboo that burdens the product using the largest possible number of channels in such a way that none of them could convey embarrassing matter. By functioning in this way, these ads can stay within the limits of “decency” and even, play with the tradition established by previous and more prudish sanpro ads. It is also interesting to note that ads that defy tradition and dare to use the word ‘period’ are the ones that also present more ingenious forms of indirectness in the other channels. An excellent example of this would be the television ad for o.b. Comfort – a perfect summing-up ad by itself, where image, text, voice intonation, facial and bodily expressions, music, silence, and sound effects, all play an important part when dealing with taboo.

Studying the way taboos are dealt with in ads is extremely revealing about the ways essential concepts to our social lives are perceived and conveyed. This book has exposed points that connect the study of taboo in ads to other wider areas in cultural studies and analysed some forms these connections might assume. However, many more avenues can be explored with rewarding results.

This study of taboo allows for the linking of taboo issues as they are represented in advertising to wider cultural issues. One such connection could take the form of a detailed analysis of the way understanding of and reaction to taboos

varies according to the different cultures. Other possible avenues could be in the field of gender – an area where the study of sanpro ads can be of great relevance.

The consumption habits of viewers can also be elucidated by the way liquor and perfumes are often marketed with reference to sex. In the area of marketing studies, a related study could be undertaken of the lifecycle of products and a possible connection between them and use of taboo as a strategy at a given point of that lifecycle. Such a study could even include statistic research relating the different categories of products and their relationship to taboo strategies.

The matter of the socially correct body image is also an issue that is certainly present in the viewers' mind when they watch ads for healthy food like the ones featured in this selection. This possibility of establishing a number of unexpected connections with other social areas contributes to making the subject under study even more fascinating.

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